# Socialist Revolutions 1918–1949

## From Europe to Asia

Jan Lavrinovski

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## After October: The World Awakens (1918–1919)

The October Revolution was not a Russian event in the narrow sense. It was the first global breach in the system of world capitalism. When the workers and peasants took power in Petrograd in 1917, it was not a local upheaval of hunger and chaos, but the first conscious act of the working class seizing history with its own hands. The old order of empires, monarchs, and capitalists was already collapsing under the strain of the imperialist war. The war had exposed the true nature of capitalism as a system of exploitation and rivalry among great powers, fighting over markets and colonies while workers died in the trenches. The Bolshevik victory transformed despair into action — it proved that the working class could rule, that production could be organized not for profit but for need.

Marx and Engels had already foretold this. In their thought, communism was not a utopia invented by dreamers but the necessary outcome of capitalist development itself. Capitalism builds its own gravedigger: the organized worker, disciplined in industry, united across nations by common exploitation. Marx saw that when workers lose everything but their chains, they have nothing left to defend but the future. Engels described the modern proletariat as both the product and the destroyer of capitalist civilization — a class whose emancipation would mean the emancipation of all humanity from class rule.

Lenin extended these ideas into the age of imperialism. He showed that by the early 20th century capitalism had entered its highest and last stage — a world system of monopolies, finance capital, and colonial oppression. The contradictions that Marx found in the factory had expanded to the globe. The war of 1914–1918 was not a war of nations but of capital against capital, driven by the division of the world into spheres of exploitation. The October Revolution broke the chain at its weakest link. Lenin taught that revolution need not wait for the most advanced country, but could begin where imperialism was weakest, and where the alliance of workers and peasants could destroy the old order first.

The success of October was therefore both national and international. In Russia, it overthrew the landlords and capitalists, destroyed the remnants of feudalism, and created the first state of workers and peasants. Internationally, it gave the working class everywhere a living example — that the theories of Marx and Engels were not abstract formulas but the description of a real movement, a force that could shape the world. The old slogan “Workers of all countries, unite!” ceased to be a dream; it became a program of action.

Across the world, from Berlin to Budapest, from Shanghai to Bombay, the workers and the oppressed began to see themselves not as spectators of history but as its authors. The echo of the October guns reached the mines of Germany, the factories of Britain, the villages of China and India. It awakened a new consciousness that the fight against capitalism was global, that the system of imperialism could not be reformed but must be overthrown.

The foundation of international revolution, as Marx, Engels, and Lenin taught, was not a question of morality or charity between nations, but of historical necessity. Capitalism had

created a world economy; it had united all peoples in exploitation. Only through the united struggle of all workers could humanity free itself. The October victory was the first act in this global process. It announced to the world that the age of bourgeois civilization had entered its decline, and that a new age — the age of the workers — had begun.

The years that followed the First World War were years of collapse. The victorious powers called their peace a triumph of democracy, yet it was only a redivision of colonies and markets among the same imperial masters. The war had drained the strength of Europe, shattered economies, and left millions of workers unemployed. Entire cities were filled with wounded veterans and starving families. The supposed victors — Britain, France, and the United States — emerged with greater financial power but with deep internal unrest. The defeated nations — Germany, Austria, Hungary, and the Ottoman lands — lay in ruin, their peoples driven to despair. The old order of empires was breaking down, but no new order had yet taken its place.

Imperialism had promised prosperity through conquest, but it brought devastation to both the oppressor and the oppressed. The colonies that had supplied Europe's industries with raw materials and soldiers now began to awaken. In India, Egypt, Indochina, and China, millions saw that European "civilization" had been a mask for domination and plunder. The war that was fought "for freedom" had in truth been a war for markets, and the colonies bore its heaviest price. Famine and disease swept through the subject nations, while the imperial powers imposed heavier taxes to rebuild their broken economies. The colonial workers, who had fought under foreign flags, returned with new consciousness — they had been used as tools of profit and now saw their real enemy not abroad, but at home, in the system that chained them.

The instability of the post-war years was not accidental; it was the direct expression of the contradictions of imperialism that Lenin had exposed before 1917. When capital became monopoly and finance, when every corner of the world was divided among the few great powers, further expansion could only come through war and destruction. The peace of Versailles did not end that struggle; it merely postponed it. Reparations strangled Germany, and the great financial powers used debt as a weapon to maintain domination. Behind the illusion of peace lay a system that could not recover, for its very structure was built on exploitation.

Europe's working class felt this truth in their daily lives. Prices rose, wages fell, food was scarce, and unemployment spread. Governments spoke of rebuilding, but factories stood idle while speculation and corruption flourished. The workers began to turn to the new banners of socialism, remembering that in Russia the workers had taken the factories and the peasants the land. Everywhere strikes erupted — in Britain's docks, in France's railways, in Italy's steel plants, and across Central Europe. Councils of workers appeared, inspired by the Soviet model. Even within the defeated nations, where despair seemed complete, revolutionary thought began to grow.

The bourgeoisie tried to restore its rule through parliamentary democracy, but the workers had lost faith in the promises of ballots that changed nothing. They saw that bourgeois

democracy had led them to the trenches and to hunger. The old parties of liberalism could no longer disguise their service to capital. Even the social-democrats, who had supported the imperialist war, stood exposed as allies of the ruling class. The war had revealed the real nature of their "reformism": they had chosen order over revolution, national loyalty over international solidarity.

Amid this disintegration, the call of socialism spread from Europe to Asia. The struggles of workers and peasants became one. In China, the May Fourth Movement arose in response to the same imperial arrogance that divided Europe; in India, anti-colonial revolts gained new life; in Korea and Indonesia, uprisings broke out against Japanese and Dutch domination. The world was no longer divided between civilized centers and backward peripheries — all were drawn into the same storm.

The post-war years thus marked the beginning of a new epoch. Imperialism had exhausted itself, and capitalism stood exposed before humanity. The October Revolution had shown one path — the conquest of power by the workers and peasants — and now, across continents, the masses began to seek their own way to the same goal. The question was no longer whether the old order would fall, but how, and under whose leadership, the new would arise.

The collapse of the old socialist movement during the war revealed a deep rot at its core. The Second International, once formed under the banner of Marx and Engels, had betrayed its purpose when its leading parties supported their own imperialist governments in 1914. Instead of calling workers to refuse the slaughter, the leaders of social democracy voted for war credits, helping to send millions of workers to die for their exploiters. In those tragic years, the unity of the working class across nations was broken, replaced by the poison of patriotism and the defense of "one's own" bourgeoisie. The International that had once proclaimed the solidarity of all workers now became an accomplice of imperialism.

Out of this betrayal arose the need for a new organization — one that would restore the revolutionary essence of Marx's and Engels' thought, renewed through the experience of Lenin and the Bolshevik victory. In 1919, in the midst of hunger and chaos, delegates from revolutionary groups and parties gathered in Moscow to found the Third International, also called the Communist International, or Comintern. It was not merely a continuation of the earlier movement but its rebirth — a union purified by struggle, dedicated to the world revolution that the Second International had abandoned.

The Comintern's founding declaration was both a call and a promise. It called upon workers everywhere to break from reformism, from the false belief that capitalism could be improved through parliaments or gradual reforms. It promised a new unity, not of words, but of deeds — the organization of the working class as an army of revolution. The watchword was not compromise but power. Its task was to prepare for the overthrow of capitalism in every land, to coordinate struggles across borders, and to ensure that no revolution would stand isolated as the Paris Commune or the Hungarian Republic had been.

Lenin viewed the Comintern as the concrete form of proletarian internationalism — the unity of workers beyond nations, languages, and races. It was not a Russian creation imposed on

others, but the necessary outcome of the global condition of capitalism. Just as production had become international, so must revolution. The workers of every land faced the same enemy: the bourgeoisie and imperial capital. The Comintern sought to make their struggle one.

In its early congresses, the Comintern combined the clarity of Marxist thought with the urgency of revolutionary action. It denounced the illusions of bourgeois democracy, explaining that the capitalist state could not serve workers' interests because it existed to defend property and privilege. The task of communists, therefore, was not to reform the state but to destroy it and replace it with the dictatorship of the workers — a state of a new type that would begin the transition to a stateless, classless society.

The Comintern also brought together anti-imperialist movements from the colonies, seeing in their fight against foreign domination the same struggle waged by workers against domestic capital. For the first time, the oppressed peoples of Asia and Africa were not treated as passive subjects of European policy, but as allies and equals in the world revolution. The idea of internationalism expanded beyond Europe to embrace all humanity suffering under the capitalist system.

The Third International stood as both symbol and organization of this new unity. It linked the revolutionary uprisings in Germany and Hungary, the strikes in Britain and France, and the anti-colonial revolts in Asia under a single red banner. It expressed in practical form the thought of Marx, Engels, and Lenin: that the liberation of each class and nation depends upon the liberation of all.

Yet, even in its birth, the Comintern faced enormous challenges — isolation of Soviet Russia, hostility from capitalist powers, and the uneven development of revolutionary movements. Still, in those years between 1919 and the early 1920s, the dream of a world transformed by workers' hands seemed within reach. The red flag that flew over the Kremlin was seen not as a symbol of one country, but of the coming unity of humankind against oppression.

The end of the First World War did not bring peace to Europe; it brought a deep and open class war. The victors and the vanquished alike were shaken by the same forces — hunger, inflation, unemployment, and the loss of faith in the old rulers. The bourgeois order that had promised prosperity through progress and science stood revealed as a system of ruin. The defeated Central Powers, above all Germany, Austria, and Hungary, became laboratories where the contradictions of capitalism reached their sharpest form.

In Germany, the November Revolution of 1918 began as a revolt of sailors and workers who refused to die for a lost cause. The Kaiser fled, the empire collapsed, and the streets filled with red flags. For a moment, power was in the hands of the workers' and soldiers' councils, which had sprung up in every major city. These councils resembled the soviets of Russia: direct organs of workers' power born from the necessity of the struggle itself. Yet the Social Democratic Party, instead of transferring power to the workers, moved swiftly to restore capitalist order. They called for "democracy," but what they meant was the preservation of bourgeois rule under a new form.

The German bourgeoisie, terrified of losing its property and privileges, allied with the old military officers and the reformist leaders of social democracy. Together they drowned the revolution in blood. The workers were disarmed, the councils dissolved, and the revolutionary leaders — Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht — were murdered by soldiers acting under orders from a "democratic" government. This crime marked the true face of the new German republic: a republic built on the corpses of the working class. It proved that bourgeois democracy was not a step toward socialism but its enemy in disguise.

In Austria, the collapse of the Habsburg Empire produced a similar tension. The old feudal aristocracy vanished overnight, leaving behind a shattered economy and starving cities. Workers formed councils, peasants seized land, and for a brief moment, the question of power was open. But once again, the reformists — fearful of revolutionary upheaval — chose compromise. They proclaimed a "republic of the people" while keeping the machinery of capitalism intact. The workers' councils were tolerated only as advisory bodies, stripped of real authority. The social-democratic leaders preached patience and national unity, insisting that socialism must come through the gradual moral reform of society. This illusion served the bourgeoisie well, allowing them to rebuild their strength while the workers starved.

Hungary went further and paid the heaviest price. There, under Béla Kun, the working class and poor peasants tried to turn the revolutionary wave into power. For a few months in 1919, the Hungarian Soviet Republic existed — a state of workers and peasants attempting to reorganize society without landlords or capitalists. It introduced socialized production, workers' control, and efforts at egalitarian reform under the most desperate conditions. But Hungary was isolated, surrounded by enemies, blockaded by the Allies, and betrayed by the European social democrats. The Red Army of workers was crushed by foreign intervention and domestic reaction. The Soviet Republic fell, and a white terror followed — thousands of workers were executed, and the bourgeoisie returned in vengeance.

Meanwhile, in the victorious Allied states — Britain, France, and Italy — the same contradictions burned beneath the surface. The war had enriched the capitalists while destroying the lives of the workers. Promises of a "land fit for heroes" gave way to unemployment and rising prices. Millions of soldiers returned from the front to find themselves jobless and hungry. Strikes erupted across the continent; in Italy, workers occupied factories, forming councils that echoed the Russian and German examples. The bourgeoisie trembled, but the reformist leaders once more preached patience, urging faith in parliamentary solutions.

The war had thus exposed a universal truth: capitalism could no longer satisfy even the basic needs of its own people. The contrast between the wealth of a few and the misery of the many had become intolerable. The middle classes, ruined by inflation, turned bitter and unstable; the peasants demanded land; the workers demanded power. The old structures of order were collapsing, yet the new had not yet triumphed.

Germany, Austria, and Hungary stood at the center of this crisis — nations destroyed by war yet rich in revolutionary energy. They showed the world both the possibility and the peril of the post-war period. Where organization and clear revolutionary leadership were lacking, the

workers' energy was crushed or misled. Where reformists and opportunists prevailed, the ruling class survived under new banners. But the lessons of these struggles did not vanish. They taught the international movement that socialism could not be achieved through compromise with the bourgeoisie. Only the full transfer of power to the workers could end the chain of exploitation.

The October Revolution did not belong to Russia alone. It was the first realization of a historical process that had been maturing within the world system of capitalism for generations. The workers and peasants who took power in Petrograd acted not as Russians, but as the advance guard of humanity. They stood at a point in history where the contradictions of capitalism — between wealth and poverty, labor and capital, oppressor and oppressed — had reached a breaking point. The revolution was not a national uprising of a peculiar people; it was the expression of a global truth: that the age of private property and exploitation had entered its decay, and the age of social transformation had begun.

The bourgeois world sought to explain the October victory as a Russian anomaly — the result of backwardness, chaos, or cunning. But that view itself was the language of fear. What happened in Russia could happen anywhere, because the causes of revolution were not born in the soil of one country, but in the structure of world capitalism itself. Industrial exploitation, colonial subjugation, imperialist war — these were the true international forces that united workers and peasants across continents. The revolution revealed that behind national borders lay a single system of oppression, and therefore a single enemy.

Marx and Engels had foreseen this unity long before it became visible in practice. They showed that capitalism, in creating a world market, had also created a world working class. The same machines that chained workers in Manchester, Essen, and St. Petersburg also tied together their fates. The proletariat had no homeland because its labor created wealth everywhere yet owned nothing anywhere. Lenin carried this thought further when he declared that the victory of socialism could begin in one country but could not remain confined there. The revolution in Russia was a spark meant to ignite a worldwide fire.

The years following 1917 proved this truth. The uprising of German workers, the councils of Hungary and Austria, the strikes in Britain and Italy, and the growing unrest in Asia and the colonies — all were reflections of the same historical necessity. The revolutionary impulse moved not by imitation but by correspondence; the same conditions that produced October reappeared in every industrial center and every oppressed nation. Wherever capitalism had spread, it had sown the seeds of its own destruction.

Thus, the spirit of revolution was international in essence. It was the awakening of humanity to its collective strength, the realization that labor, not capital, is the creator of the world. It was not a Russian thought but a human one. What began in Petrograd was the visible beginning of a transformation that belonged to all workers, all peasants, all oppressed peoples. The red banner raised over the Winter Palace was not a symbol of Russia's destiny, but of humanity's.

The bourgeoisie of all countries understood this more quickly than many reformists did. They saw in the Russian example not a local rebellion but a threat to their own rule. That is why they united in intervention, blockade, and propaganda to isolate the revolution. Yet, despite their strength, they could not extinguish the new idea that had taken root — that history was no longer the property of kings and financiers, but of those who labored.

The first chapter of the new age was written in Russian, but its language was universal. The October Revolution announced that the era of national isolation had ended and that the fate of each people was bound to the fate of all. The world revolution was not a dream or a prophecy; it was the unfolding of the contradictions of capitalism on a world scale. The Russian workers were the first to act, but their victory belonged to the world proletariat. The revolution, therefore, was not an accident of geography, but the inevitable answer to a global system of exploitation.

Its message endures: that socialism is not the dream of one nation, but the collective future of humanity. The workers of all lands share one struggle, one hope, and one destiny — to free themselves from the rule of capital and to build a world where labor is not servitude but creation, where humanity governs itself without masters, and where the divisions of nation and class disappear into a common life of solidarity and equality.

## The German Spartacist Uprising (1918–1919)

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the German working class stood as the most advanced and organized in Europe. Decades of industrial growth had concentrated millions of workers in the mines of the Ruhr, the factories of Berlin, and the shipyards of Hamburg. Their organizations — trade unions, cooperatives, and especially the Social Democratic Party (SPD) — appeared to embody the power and maturity of the modern proletariat. Marxism had deep roots in Germany; the writings of Marx and Engels were studied not only by intellectuals but by workers themselves. They filled the halls of workers' clubs and socialist schools, discussing the transformation of society. To many, Germany seemed destined to be the birthplace of socialism in the heart of Europe.

Yet beneath this impressive structure lay a contradiction. The SPD, once founded on revolutionary principles, had become increasingly reformist. Its leaders, instead of preparing the workers for the conquest of power, sought accommodation with the bourgeois state. They participated in parliaments, negotiated labor laws, and preached that progress could come through gradual reform rather than revolution. The party had grown large and respectable — and in that respectability lay its corruption. As Lenin had warned before the war, opportunism was the disease of a labor movement tied too closely to bourgeois legality.

When the First World War erupted in 1914, this contradiction reached its breaking point. The SPD leaders, led by Friedrich Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann, and Gustav Noske, betrayed the fundamental thought of internationalism. Instead of opposing the imperialist war, they voted in favor of war credits and joined the national defense committees. The party that had once

proclaimed “Workers of all countries, unite!” now told the German workers to fight their French and Russian brothers for the glory of the Kaiser. The betrayal of August 4, 1914 — the day the SPD voted for war — became one of the darkest moments in the history of the workers’ movement. It marked the moral death of the Second International, which collapsed under the weight of chauvinism and cowardice.

But while the party’s leadership betrayed socialism, the workers did not. In the factories and trenches, opposition grew. Men like Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg stood against the tide, denouncing the war as a crime of imperialism. They were persecuted, imprisoned, and silenced, yet their message spread among the soldiers and workers who had seen enough of slaughter. From these forces, the Spartacus League was born — a revolutionary nucleus within the shattered socialist movement, calling for the end of the war, for the overthrow of the bourgeois state, and for power to the workers’ councils.

By 1918, Germany was collapsing. Hunger, inflation, and despair broke the army’s discipline. The sailors at Kiel mutinied, and their example ignited a wave of insurrections across the country. Workers’ and soldiers’ councils appeared in city after city, echoing the soviets of Russia. The monarchy crumbled, and the Kaiser fled into exile. For a brief, immense moment, the German working class stood at the threshold of power. History had placed in their hands the possibility of completing the work begun by the Russian Revolution — to extend the revolution into the heart of industrial Europe.

But again, the same leaders who had betrayed the workers in 1914 moved to betray them in 1918. Ebert and Noske, now at the head of the new “republic,” feared the workers more than the old ruling class. They promised peace and democracy, but their true aim was to preserve capitalism under a republican flag. The bourgeoisie, defeated on the battlefield, found in them new defenders. Noske, given control of the armed forces, declared, “Someone must be the bloodhound” — and he meant it.

Thus, in the very hour when revolution was possible, the Social Democratic leadership turned its weapons against the workers. They allied with the remnants of the imperial army — the Freikorps — to suppress the councils and restore “order.” The party of Marx and Engels became the executioner of the proletariat. The revolution that might have transformed Europe was strangled not by foreign invasion, but by the betrayal of its own leaders.

The lesson of Germany was the lesson Lenin had already drawn from 1914: that reformism within the workers’ movement is the most dangerous enemy, for it disguises itself as friendship while serving the bourgeoisie. The SPD proved that no matter how large or popular a workers’ party becomes, if it accepts the framework of capitalism, it becomes an instrument of that system. The fate of the German Revolution — its promise and its tragedy — began with this betrayal.

Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht stood as the living conscience of the German working class in its most critical hour. While the leaders of the Social Democratic Party had surrendered to imperialism, these two refused to betray the workers’ cause. Both understood that socialism could not be achieved through the comfortable halls of parliament or through

compromise with the bourgeoisie, but only through the organized power of the working class in struggle. Their revolutionary program was rooted in the same foundation of thought that guided Marx, Engels, and Lenin — that the emancipation of the workers must be the act of the workers themselves, and that the bourgeois state, no matter its form, must be overthrown, not reformed.

Karl Liebknecht, the son of one of the founders of the SPD, broke from his party in 1914 when he alone in the Reichstag voted against war credits. His words — "The main enemy is at home" — expressed the essence of Marxist internationalism at a time when others had abandoned it. For Liebknecht, the working class had no fatherland, because its oppression was international. His defiance made him a target of the ruling class and of his own party's leadership. Imprisoned for his opposition, he became a symbol of revolutionary integrity to workers who had begun to see through the lies of "national unity."

Rosa Luxemburg, one of the most brilliant Marxist thinkers of her generation, fought tirelessly against opportunism within the SPD long before the war. She saw clearly that the parliamentary path was not a road to socialism but a trap. The growing participation of the SPD in the Reichstag, its compromises with bourgeois parties, and its gradual acceptance of the capitalist state all signaled, to her, a profound decay of revolutionary spirit. Luxemburg's writings warned that without revolutionary theory and action, the movement would become a machine of reform, administering capitalism rather than abolishing it. Her thought was close to Lenin's in its insistence that the class struggle must aim at power, not at accommodation.

During the war, Luxemburg and Liebknecht united their forces in the Spartacus League, named after the ancient rebel who led slaves against Rome. The League's program rejected both nationalism and parliamentary illusion. It called for immediate peace, for the arming of the workers, for the transfer of industry and land to collective ownership, and for the creation of workers' councils as organs of power. Like Lenin, they believed that these councils represented a new type of state — the rule of the working class in place of the bourgeois parliament. Their vision was not a copy of the Russian model but an expression of the same revolutionary principle: that the state must serve as a weapon of the workers in the transition toward communism, and then itself disappear as class distinctions vanished.

Luxemburg, in her writings on the Russian Revolution, expressed both admiration and independent critique. She supported Lenin and the Bolsheviks as the first to turn Marxism into living revolution. She understood that without their bold seizure of power, the revolution would have been crushed by the bourgeoisie. At the same time, she warned of the dangers of excessive centralization and the suppression of democratic life within the workers' movement. For her, freedom was not the privilege of a few but the creative energy of the masses themselves. Yet even in her criticism, Luxemburg never wavered in her solidarity with the Russian Revolution or in her belief that the dictatorship of the workers was necessary to destroy capitalism. She differed in method, not in goal.

The program of the Spartacists was thus the true continuation of Marx and Lenin — international in spirit, uncompromising in content, and hostile to the illusions of reformism. They understood that the bourgeois state, even when dressed in republican clothing, remained

the dictatorship of the capitalists. They saw that parliaments were institutions designed to deceive the workers with the appearance of power while leaving the real power — property and the army — untouched. For this reason, they rejected the call to participate in the National Assembly elections of 1919, declaring that the only legitimate authority was that of the councils.

In their final days, Luxemburg and Liebknecht stood not merely as agitators but as embodiments of a revolutionary idea. Their alignment with Marx and Lenin lay not in words alone but in action — in their refusal to accept compromise, in their belief that socialism demanded the total destruction of the old order and the creation of a new society based on workers' power. Their program was short-lived, their movement crushed, but their thought continued to inspire generations.

The tragedy of their defeat did not erase their truth: that the liberation of humanity cannot be achieved through the institutions of its oppressors. The revolutionary path is difficult and fraught with danger, yet it remains the only path that leads beyond capitalism. Luxemburg and Liebknecht walked that path to the end, carrying the torch of the world revolution that began in Petrograd and burned, briefly but brightly, in the streets of Berlin.

When the German workers rose in January 1919, it was not the beginning of chaos, as the bourgeoisie claimed, but the last cry of a revolution betrayed. The Spartacist uprising in Berlin was not a conspiracy of a few agitators, but a desperate attempt by the working class to seize the power that had been stolen from its councils after the fall of the Kaiser. The workers, inspired by the example of Russia and led by the Spartacus League, demanded the end of the provisional government, the arming of the proletariat, and the creation of a socialist republic based on the councils. Their movement was born of hunger, injustice, and the knowledge that the new republic was only the old empire under another name.

The response of the ruling class was immediate and merciless. The so-called "Social Democratic" government of Friedrich Ebert and his minister of defense, Gustav Noske, chose alliance with the generals and the capitalist elite over solidarity with the workers. Noske's infamous words — "Someone must be the bloodhound" — became the program of the new regime. The Freikorps, reactionary militias made up of demobilized officers, monarchists, and adventurers, were unleashed upon Berlin under the pretext of restoring order. These armed bands carried out massacres, executions, and acts of terror against unarmed workers. The streets of the capital ran with the blood of those who had dared to dream of socialism.

The uprising was crushed within days. Yet the rulers were not content with suppressing the revolt; they sought to destroy the very symbols of revolution. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who had led the Spartacus League and inspired the uprising through their writings and speeches, were hunted down like criminals. On January 15, 1919, they were captured by Freikorps officers with the approval of the Social Democratic authorities. They were beaten, interrogated, and finally murdered — Liebknecht shot in the head and his body dumped anonymously in a morgue, Luxemburg struck with a rifle butt and thrown into a Berlin canal. The official press reported their deaths with satisfaction, calling it "the end of the troublemakers."

This was no isolated act of vengeance. It was the conscious expression of the bourgeois state's class character. Even under the guise of democracy, the state revealed itself as an instrument of violence, existing to defend property and suppress the working class. The murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht was an act of capitalist terror, no different in essence from the massacres of workers in Paris in 1871 or the brutalities of the Tsar's regime before 1917. The names of Ebert and Noske joined the long list of those who had served as executioners for the bourgeoisie, proving that reformists, when faced with the threat of real socialism, will always turn to repression.

The press of the new republic participated in the crime, spreading lies that the Spartacists had been plotting anarchy and civil war. In truth, the civil war already existed — the war of the rich against the poor, of the ruling class against the working class. The Freikorps' bullets were aimed not only at individuals but at the idea they represented: that workers could rule themselves, that capitalism could be overthrown, that socialism was not a distant dream but an immediate task. In killing Luxemburg and Liebknecht, the bourgeoisie hoped to kill the revolution itself.

But history cannot be silenced by murder. Luxemburg's writings, her vision of socialism as the self-liberation of the masses, survived in the hearts of workers across the world. Liebknecht's call — "The enemy is at home!" — became the rallying cry of internationalism against imperialist war and class oppression. The bourgeois state could drown their bodies, but not their thought. Each act of repression only revealed more clearly the true face of bourgeois democracy — a democracy that defends the minority of exploiters against the majority of workers.

The murders of January 1919 marked the birth of the Weimar Republic in blood. From that moment, its fate was sealed. A republic founded on the corpses of its own workers could never be a true democracy. The same Freikorps who murdered Luxemburg and Liebknecht would later form the core of the fascist movement, proving that counter-revolution and fascism were born of the same class fear. The German bourgeoisie, aided by reformist leaders, had preserved its rule for a time, but at the cost of planting the seeds of its own destruction.

The martyrdom of Luxemburg and Liebknecht stands as one of the great dividing lines in the history of socialism. It separated those who believed that socialism could be achieved through the institutions of capitalism from those who understood that the bourgeois state must be overthrown, not persuaded. Their deaths revealed that reformism, when put to the test, becomes counter-revolution. Yet their sacrifice also gave new strength to the international movement, proving that the thought of Marx and Lenin lived not only in books but in blood and struggle.

The defeat of the German Revolution in 1919 was not only the result of bourgeois violence and social-democratic betrayal; it was also the consequence of organizational weakness within the revolutionary camp itself. The workers of Germany displayed immense courage, consciousness, and willingness to fight. They created councils, seized factories, and took to the streets in defiance of the capitalist order. Yet courage alone cannot replace the clear,

disciplined leadership necessary to transform uprising into victory. The tragedy of Germany was that the proletariat rose without the kind of revolutionary party that Lenin had built in Russia — a party capable of uniting theory and action, spontaneity and direction, into a single force aimed at power.

Rosa Luxemburg, despite her brilliance and revolutionary devotion, placed great trust in the spontaneous energy of the masses. She believed that the workers' movement, through its own struggle, would develop the strength and clarity needed to seize power. Her thought rejected bureaucratic rigidity and upheld the creative capacity of the working class. This confidence in the masses was noble and sincere, but it proved fatal in the concrete conditions of 1918–1919. The spontaneity of revolt, without the structure of a disciplined party, allowed the counter-revolution to act with greater coordination and cruelty.

Lenin had faced the same question years earlier and had drawn different conclusions. Through his experience in the Russian movement, he learned that spontaneity, though vital as the living spirit of revolution, must be guided by a conscious vanguard organization. The working class, left to its immediate struggles, can develop class awareness and militancy, but it cannot by itself formulate the thought and plan necessary to overthrow the state. For that, a party of revolutionaries — trained, tested, and bound by discipline — is indispensable. The vanguard does not stand above the workers; it expresses their historical task with clarity and direction. It transforms scattered revolt into a coordinated struggle for power.

In Germany, the Spartacus League had immense moral authority but little organizational strength. It had been born out of persecution, fragmented by prison and censorship, and lacked the time to form a united cadre rooted in every factory and district. When the revolution came, its influence was powerful in spirit but weak in structure. It had not yet become a party capable of leading millions in a decisive battle for power. The newly formed Communist Party of Germany (KPD), established only weeks before the January uprising, was too young to guide the movement. Without a clear plan or unified command, the uprising broke out prematurely, isolated in Berlin while the rest of the country remained unprepared.

The bourgeoisie, meanwhile, acted with full knowledge of its interests. It had at its disposal not only the armed forces but also the reformist leaders who used the language of socialism to defend capitalism. The combination of military organization and political deceit proved fatal to the uncoordinated masses. The lesson, as Lenin emphasized repeatedly, was that the class struggle cannot succeed through mere enthusiasm; it must be directed by an organized political force that knows when to strike and how to consolidate victory once achieved.

The German experience thus confirmed one of the central teachings of Lenin's thought: that the question of power cannot be solved by partial victories or moral appeals. The bourgeois state, even in its republican form, must be destroyed and replaced by a state of the workers — the dictatorship of the proletariat — which serves as the instrument of transformation. In Germany, the workers' councils existed but did not seize the full apparatus of state power; they hesitated, divided between those who sought compromise and those who sought revolution. The lack of a unified, disciplined vanguard allowed the bourgeoisie to regain control of the army, the police, and the press.

Luxemburg's devotion to mass democracy and her suspicion of centralized authority expressed a deep moral truth — that socialism must be the creation of the workers themselves. Yet Lenin's understanding completed the picture: without the concentration of revolutionary energy into a single organized party, the bourgeoisie would always exploit the divisions and inexperience of the masses. The spontaneity of the workers is the heart of revolution, but organization is its mind. Without the mind, the heart can be crushed.

The failure of the German Revolution was therefore not a failure of spirit but of form. It showed that the proletariat, no matter how militant, cannot rely solely on its instinctive power. It must possess an instrument equal to the complexity and violence of capitalist rule — a revolutionary party rooted in the class, armed with clear thought, disciplined in action, and committed to the conquest of power. The difference between the victory of October in Russia and the defeat of January in Germany lay precisely here: in Russia, the workers had a party; in Germany, they had only leaders.

This lesson, written in blood, became one of the most important for the international communist movement. The revolution in Germany revealed not the weakness of the working class, but the necessity of Lenin's organizational principle — that socialism can triumph only through unity of purpose, discipline, and the conscious seizure of the state.

The defeat of the German Revolution in 1919 revealed one of the most decisive truths of modern history: that socialism cannot coexist with bourgeois democracy. The German workers had overthrown the monarchy, but they stopped short of overthrowing the state itself. They accepted the illusion that the old apparatus — the army, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and parliament — could somehow serve the cause of the workers if placed under new management. This illusion, carefully cultivated by the Social Democratic leaders, became the grave of the revolution.

The Weimar Republic, hailed by the bourgeoisie as the dawn of freedom, was in reality the restoration of capitalist rule under democratic disguise. The forms of liberty — elections, parliaments, speeches — concealed the substance of class domination. Property remained untouched; the banks, factories, and land stayed in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The army that had served the Kaiser now served Ebert and Noske. The police that once shot strikers in the name of the empire now did so in the name of the republic. The state changed its flag but not its nature.

Lenin had foreseen this outcome. In his study of the state and revolution, he wrote that the bourgeois state, no matter how democratic, remains an instrument of class oppression. Its parliament is a mask for the dictatorship of capital. Its bureaucracy, its legal system, and its armed forces exist to defend private property and suppress the workers. Therefore, socialism cannot emerge by simply taking over this machinery; it must destroy it and replace it with a new form of power — the dictatorship of the workers, expressed through their councils. Only when the old state is smashed can a new one arise to begin the transition to communism.

The German tragedy confirmed this lesson with brutal clarity. The workers' councils, which had emerged spontaneously in 1918, were genuine organs of proletarian democracy — direct,

participatory, and revolutionary. In them, workers and soldiers debated, decided, and acted collectively. These councils were the embryo of a socialist republic. Yet, under pressure from the SPD and the bourgeois parties, they surrendered their authority to the newly formed National Assembly, which claimed to represent "the whole people." In truth, it represented the class that owned and controlled society. The councils voluntarily handed back the power that had been theirs, trusting in the institutions of the very order they had overthrown.

The result was inevitable. Once power was returned to the bourgeois state, the workers were disarmed both physically and politically. The revolution's enemies — the army, the police, the judges, and the capitalist press — regained their strength. The same apparatus that had survived beneath the surface now reemerged to crush the very movement that had spared it. Bourgeois democracy became the weapon of counter-revolution, proving Lenin's teaching that form cannot erase content: a capitalist state remains capitalist even when it calls itself republican.

The experience of 1918–1919 thus marked the end of all illusions in parliamentary socialism. The reformists who believed that the path to socialism lay through the vote and gradual reform showed themselves to be defenders of the existing order. The workers who trusted them paid with their lives. The murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht was not only a tragedy of individuals but the death of the belief that socialism could be born from within the institutions of bourgeois democracy.

In the aftermath, the German working class was left divided and exhausted. The councils were dissolved, the Communist Party persecuted, and the SPD entrenched itself as the party of order. Yet beneath this defeat, the historical lesson endured. The revolution had failed, but it had not been in vain. It proved that the working class cannot share power with the bourgeoisie, for the bourgeoisie will use every form of democracy, every institution of legality, to destroy the workers' movement. The state is not neutral; it is the organized force of one class against another.

The German Revolution thus stands as both warning and prophecy. It warned that compromise with capitalism leads to ruin, and it prophesied that future revolutions would succeed only when they dared to carry Lenin's principle to its conclusion — when they refused to leave any fragment of power in the hands of the old order.

For socialism to live, bourgeois democracy must die. The workers must not only seize power but hold it entirely, transforming the state from an organ of oppression into an organ of emancipation — a state that defends the workers as the old state defended capital, a state that begins the process through which class itself disappears.

The blood of the Spartacists did not flow in vain. It wrote in crimson letters across the history of the 20th century the central truth of revolution: that half-measures serve the enemy, and that socialism is not born in parliaments but in the councils of workers, in the factories, in the communes, and in the streets. Only when the power of the bourgeoisie is broken completely can humanity begin its path toward a world without masters and without exploitation.

## The Hungarian Soviet Republic (1919)

The year 1919 found Hungary standing amid the ruins of empire. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy, once a vast machine of oppression over many nations, had disintegrated under the combined weight of military defeat and social collapse. The soldiers who returned from the front brought not victory but hunger, disease, and despair. The cities were paralyzed, the countryside restless, and the old ruling classes stunned by the destruction of their world. The ancient order of landlords and nobles — the backbone of Hungarian feudalism — still clung to power but had lost all moral authority. Into this chaos stepped a new force: the organized working class, inspired by the victory of the Russian Revolution and determined to follow its path.

The disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had left Hungary in a state of disarray. Industry was halted by lack of raw materials and markets, agriculture was collapsing under shortages and hoarding, and the workers in Budapest faced starvation. The bourgeois government of Count Károlyi, which replaced the monarchy in late 1918, promised reform but failed to deliver. It hesitated between the demands of the landlords, the pressure of the Entente powers, and the rising expectations of the workers and peasants. Each day it lost support, for in the midst of hunger and unemployment it offered nothing but words. The workers, radicalized by the example of Russia and the misery of daily life, began to form councils modeled on the soviets — organs of collective authority that expressed the new will of the people.

In this atmosphere of revolutionary ferment appeared Béla Kun, a former prisoner of war who had experienced the Russian Revolution firsthand. In the prisons of Siberia, Kun had joined the Bolsheviks, absorbing their thought and witnessing the transformation of workers into rulers. When he returned to Hungary in late 1918, he brought not only the ideas of Marx and Lenin but the living example of their realization. He organized the Hungarian Communist Party with astonishing speed, uniting militant workers, disillusioned soldiers, and intellectuals who had turned against the old order.

The appeal of the communists spread rapidly through the factories and barracks of Budapest. The workers' councils, already formed spontaneously, began to align with the communists' program: expropriation of the landlords, workers' control of industry, peace with Soviet Russia, and alliance with the peasants. The bourgeoisie and the remnants of the Károlyi government watched helplessly as the authority of the state dissolved before their eyes. When the Entente powers imposed harsh territorial demands that would dismember the country, Károlyi's government lost its last support. On March 21, 1919, the Social Democratic leaders, unable to govern, turned to Béla Kun and offered a merger — an attempt to contain the revolution by sharing power. But the initiative escaped their hands. That same day, the Hungarian Soviet Republic was proclaimed — the second workers' state in the world.

The establishment of the Soviet Republic in Hungary was an echo of Russia's October Revolution, both in inspiration and in structure. The workers' councils became the foundation

of power, the Red Army was organized under revolutionary leadership, and a program of radical transformation was announced. Industry, transport, and the banks were nationalized; large estates were confiscated and turned over to collective use. The bourgeois press was suppressed, and the government declared itself the dictatorship of the proletariat — the rule of the workers and peasants against their exploiters.

Yet, while the Hungarian Revolution drew strength from the Russian example, its conditions were far harsher. It faced isolation, encirclement, and immediate hostility from all sides. The Entente powers saw in it a direct threat to their efforts to restore capitalist order in Europe. The neighboring states — Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia — were encouraged to invade. Inside the country, the landlords and bourgeoisie conspired openly, aided by foreign agents and by the reformist elements within the Social Democratic Party. Still, for a brief and heroic moment, the red flag flew over Budapest, and the workers of Hungary felt themselves part of the same world movement that had begun in Petrograd.

The Hungarian Soviet Republic was thus not an imitation, but a continuation of the revolutionary chain that had begun to form across Europe. It represented the same thought — that the workers and peasants could govern themselves, that capitalism was not eternal, and that the world revolution was no longer a theory but a living process. The fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had opened the gates of history, and through them stepped the Hungarian proletariat, seeking to transform chaos into creation.

But as the revolution advanced, so too did the forces determined to destroy it. The fate of Béla Kun's government would soon reveal the immense difficulties faced by any workers' state born in isolation — surrounded by enemies, betrayed by reformists, and struggling to survive in a continent still ruled by capital.

The Hungarian Soviet Republic was born into siege. From its first day, it faced not peace but encirclement. The entire capitalist world regarded it as a contagion that must be destroyed before it could spread. The victorious Entente powers — France, Britain, and their allies — had no intention of allowing a second workers' state to survive in Europe. They saw in Hungary a reflection of Russia's October, an echo that might awaken the workers of Vienna, Berlin, and even Paris. Thus, the Hungarian proletariat, scarcely organized and still recovering from the devastation of war, found itself under the blockade of the imperialist world and the guns of its neighbors.

The blockade was both economic and military. The ports were closed, foreign trade severed, and the country, already starving, was denied access to food and fuel. The Entente powers armed the surrounding bourgeois states — Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the remnants of Austria — and encouraged them to march against the revolution. At the same time, the old ruling classes inside Hungary conspired with these external enemies. Landlords, officers, and financiers fled to the countryside or across the border, gathering counter-revolutionary bands that promised to "restore order." The Hungarian proletarian state thus began its life surrounded by bayonets and betrayal.

The internal conditions were no less difficult. Hungary remained a country where the peasantry formed the majority of the population, and though centuries of feudal exploitation had created deep resentment against the landlords, class consciousness among the peasants was uneven. The workers of Budapest were steeped in socialist thought and organization, but the countryside, isolated and poor, often lacked both. The revolution's success therefore depended on uniting the city and the village — the worker and the peasant — into a single alliance of labor. This was precisely the strategy that Lenin had carried out in Russia, where the Bolsheviks had given the peasants land and called them to join with the workers in the creation of a new state.

Béla Kun and his comrades sought to follow the same path, but their conditions were far more precarious. The Hungarian communists attempted to redistribute the great estates and collectivize agriculture under workers' and peasants' councils. They established cooperatives, promised equality, and abolished the privileges of the nobility. Yet they lacked the material means to satisfy the immediate needs of the peasants. The blockade cut off essential goods, the countryside was exhausted, and the new state's administrative machinery was only beginning to take form. The revolutionary measures were bold, but the social foundation was fragile.

At the same time, the workers in the cities faced famine and the collapse of industry. Factories were nationalized, but the raw materials and energy supplies were nearly gone. Transport was disrupted, and the economic life of the country stood still. Despite these hardships, the workers displayed extraordinary discipline and solidarity. They organized production committees, distributed scarce food collectively, and volunteered for the Red Army. Their heroism could not overcome the fact that a proletarian state cannot build socialism in isolation and hunger. The revolution needed breathing space — a period of peace to consolidate, educate, and rebuild — yet the imperialists denied it every moment of rest.

When the counter-revolutionary armies advanced, the Hungarian Red Army — composed of workers and poor peasants — defended the republic with remarkable courage. For several weeks, they pushed back the invaders and even achieved temporary victories. The soldiers marched not for territory or empire, but for the survival of the workers' state. They fought under the red banner, inspired by the knowledge that they defended not only Hungary but the cause of socialism throughout Europe. Their struggle was the same as that of the Russian workers who had resisted the White armies and foreign intervention.

But the isolation of Hungary proved decisive. The promised aid from Soviet Russia could not arrive; between them lay hostile armies and hostile states. The revolution in Germany, which might have saved Hungary, had been drowned in blood. The Western labor movements, still confused by reformism and national divisions, were unable to act. The Hungarian Soviet Republic stood alone — the first attempt to build socialism on European soil outside Russia, surrounded by enemies and besieged by hunger.

Yet within its brief existence, the Hungarian Soviet Republic demonstrated a truth that terrified the bourgeois world: that the workers and peasants, even in a small and semi-feudal country, could govern without kings, landlords, or capitalists. It showed that socialism was

not an idea limited to the industrial centers of the West but a living possibility wherever exploitation had reached its limits. Its very survival for 133 days was a victory of spirit and thought — proof that the revolutionary wave unleashed by October was still rolling across Europe.

But the storm around it was gathering strength. As the foreign armies advanced and internal counter-revolution organized itself, the young workers' state faced not only material weakness but deep political divisions. The next stage of its struggle would reveal how those contradictions — between the demands of survival and the principles of revolution — would tear at the heart of the Hungarian experiment.

The Hungarian Soviet Republic carried within it the same contradictions that confronted all revolutions born under siege — contradictions between the immense hopes of the working class and the harsh material limits of a backward and exhausted country. Its leaders, inspired by the clarity of Marx's and Lenin's thought, understood that the workers could not wait for capitalism to heal itself before acting. Yet, in their haste to defend the revolution, they attempted to build socialism in conditions where the foundations of socialist construction — alliance between city and countryside, stable production, and mass political education — had barely begun to form. The revolution advanced faster than the consciousness and material readiness of the population, and this premature tempo soon revealed its dangers.

The most critical weakness lay in the countryside. Hungary remained, in essence, a semi-feudal country. While the old nobility had lost power politically, it still dominated the land. The peasants, millions strong, had suffered under centuries of landlord exploitation. Their hatred of the gentry was immense, yet their vision of freedom was not socialist but agrarian — each peasant desired his own piece of land, not collective property. The Communists, guided by the idea of collective farming and social ownership, sought to reorganize agriculture on a communal basis. Large estates were nationalized, and cooperative farms were established, but in practice, this policy alienated many peasants who saw it as a new form of control.

Unlike the Russian Bolsheviks, who had won the support of the peasants by immediately giving them the land, the Hungarian government hesitated between the two paths — redistribution and collectivization. It feared that individual division of land would strengthen small property and weaken the socialist character of the revolution. But collectivization, carried out amid famine, without tools or supplies, and under the pressure of war, was unsustainable. Many peasants withheld grain or even joined counter-revolutionary forces. Without their active support, the revolution was deprived of its rural base. The workers in the cities stood isolated, surrounded by a countryside that remained indifferent or hostile to their struggle.

In the cities, nationalization proceeded rapidly, yet unevenly. The Communists sought to transfer control of all major industries, transport, and trade to the workers' state. But nationalization, under conditions of hunger and disorganization, became a paper measure more than a functioning system. The councils lacked experience in management, and the administrative apparatus was incomplete. Production dropped, not from lack of will, but from

lack of materials, fuel, and coordination. The workers' enthusiasm was immense — they worked extra hours without pay, maintained order in the factories, and defended their revolution with weapons in hand — but enthusiasm could not replace coal or iron. The economy, already ruined by war, could not sustain the pace of transformation demanded by ideology and necessity.

Béla Kun's government tried to balance the revolutionary ideals of Marx and Lenin with the desperate realities of survival. Yet the tempo of events allowed little time for correction. Each day brought new crises: invasion from abroad, sabotage within, famine in the cities, and unrest in the countryside. In this turmoil, revolutionary measures were sometimes declared before the masses had the chance to understand or support them. The pace of change outstripped both political preparation and material capability. The revolution thus risked alienating those it sought to liberate — not through betrayal, as in Germany, but through the weight of its own urgency.

The structure of power within the Soviet Republic reflected these tensions. The workers' councils existed but were increasingly overshadowed by central organs struggling to maintain control amid chaos. The Red Army consumed the republic's energy, as the defense of the revolution demanded constant mobilization. The need for survival pressed against the desire for democracy. The workers' state, still forming its institutions, was forced to act as a fortress before it could become a home.

Lenin had warned that a revolution isolated in one country would face immense difficulties, and the Hungarian experience confirmed this. Without allies, without resources, surrounded by hostile states, and with an underdeveloped economic base, the Hungarian workers' government was forced to attempt in months what might have taken years under more favorable conditions. Its tempo was heroic but premature.

The weakness of peasant support, the incomplete nationalization of production, and the speed of transformation all converged into a single contradiction: the revolution's thought was ahead of its material foundation. The proletarian state existed in form but lacked the substance of mass participation and economic stability that could sustain it.

Still, the Hungarian Soviet Republic remains a shining moment in the history of the world revolution. Its failure was not the failure of socialism but of isolation and time. It proved that the will of the workers could seize power even in a country unprepared by capitalism, but it also showed that power alone does not make a revolution victorious. The revolution must grow from the roots of society — from the conscious unity of workers and peasants — and this, in Hungary, could not be achieved in the brief span of 133 days.

The Hungarian Soviet Republic stood alone, surrounded by a ring of enemies that stretched from Paris to Bucharest. From the very moment of its birth, the imperialist powers sought its destruction. They feared that the example of Budapest might awaken the workers of Vienna, Prague, and Berlin, who were already restless under hunger and post-war ruin. The Entente governments — particularly France under Clemenceau — saw in Hungary not a small local revolt but a spark that could ignite Europe. Thus, as soon as Béla Kun proclaimed the

dictatorship of the proletariat, the great powers set into motion a coordinated plan of strangulation: blockade, invasion, and propaganda.

The Allied blockade was total and deliberate. Hungary, already devastated by the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was cut off from coal, oil, food, and trade. This economic isolation aimed to starve the revolution into submission. No goods entered, no foreign credit was granted, and even neutral states were forbidden to trade. The workers and peasants, already short of bread, now faced famine engineered by imperialist policy. The so-called "democracies" of the West, which had promised self-determination and peace, instead waged war through hunger upon a people who sought to govern themselves without capitalists.

While the blockade weakened the republic from within, the external invasion began. Romania, armed and encouraged by the Entente, crossed the border in the east. Czechoslovak and French forces threatened from the north and west. The imperialists disguised their intervention as "peace enforcement," but their aim was clear: to crush the workers' state before it could consolidate. Each invasion was accompanied by propaganda declaring that the Hungarian Communists were "Bolshevik criminals," echoing the same lies used against the Russian workers two years earlier. The pattern was identical — isolation, defamation, and the creation of proxy armies to do the dirty work of imperialism.

In this campaign, the Hungarian bourgeoisie found faithful allies not only among the landlords and generals but also among the leaders of European social democracy. Just as the German SPD had drowned its own revolution in blood, so too did the Western socialist leaders betray Hungary by siding with the imperialist governments. They called for "order" and "stability," meaning the restoration of capitalist property. The Second International, resurrected under reformist leadership, denounced the Hungarian Communists as "adventurists" and "dictators." They spoke of parliamentary democracy while imperialist armies bombarded workers' towns. Their words provided moral cover for the counter-revolution.

In Vienna, the Austrian social-democratic government cooperated with the Entente, refusing to send aid to its Hungarian comrades. In Germany, the SPD government of Ebert and Noske suppressed strikes and sealed the border to prevent solidarity. In France and Britain, labor leaders who had supported the imperialist war now joined the chorus of denunciation against Béla Kun's government. The betrayal of social democracy was not accidental — it was the inevitable outcome of its class position. Having chosen to defend bourgeois democracy, it could not tolerate the existence of a workers' state, for such an example exposed its own compromises as treachery.

The result was complete isolation. Soviet Russia, itself besieged and fighting for survival, could offer only moral support. The dream of an alliance between the two workers' republics — Russia and Hungary — could not be realized. Between them lay Poland and Romania, both under anti-communist regimes armed by the Entente. The Red Army of Hungary fought heroically, but it fought alone. Its victories on the northern front, where it briefly pushed back the Czechoslovak forces, showed what the revolution could achieve when the workers were

united and inspired. Yet even these triumphs could not break the encirclement. Every gain at the front was undermined by starvation, sabotage, and the growing despair within.

The Hungarian Soviet Republic thus repeated, in accelerated form, the ordeal that Soviet Russia had endured since 1917. Both were surrounded, blockaded, and vilified. Both faced the treachery of reformists who preferred alliance with imperialism to solidarity with revolution. And both stood as symbols of defiance against a world built on exploitation. But Hungary's weakness — its small size, lack of resources, and isolation — made survival impossible. It was a workers' state besieged by an entire continent of capital.

Still, its isolation revealed a profound truth about the era. The struggle between socialism and capitalism had become global; neutrality was impossible. Every government, party, and movement was forced to choose a side. The imperialist powers, under the mask of peace, showed that they would use every weapon — blockade, invasion, lies, and even starvation — to destroy any threat to their order. The social democrats, by supporting them, proved that reformism is not a bridge between capitalism and socialism but a barrier defending the old world.

In the summer of 1919, the combined pressure of internal exhaustion and foreign aggression reached its limit. The Red Army, starving and demoralized, could no longer resist. On August 1, the Hungarian Soviet Republic fell. The bourgeoisie and foreign armies returned in triumph, but their victory carried the mark of guilt — for they had defeated not a foreign invader, but their own people's attempt at liberation.

Yet even in defeat, the Hungarian Revolution sent a message that echoed across the world: socialism could be born anywhere, and the working class of one small country could shake the imperial order of Europe. Its fall, like the fall of the Paris Commune, was a defeat only in the immediate sense. In the historical sense, it was a prophecy — a sign that the struggle of labor against capital had become a world movement that no blockade or army could forever suppress.

The fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in August 1919 was not simply a military defeat — it was the culmination of a deeper contradiction that had marked its entire existence. The young workers' state had attempted to achieve in a few months what history demands decades to mature: the full unification of workers and peasants under a single revolutionary purpose. Its courage was immense, its aims noble, but its foundation too narrow. The revolution stood as a fortress defended by workers in the cities, while the countryside remained uncertain, divided, and often indifferent. Without the full consolidation of the working class with the peasantry, the Hungarian Soviet Republic lacked the social depth needed to resist the combined assault of imperialism and reaction.

The weakness of class consolidation revealed itself most clearly in the countryside. The peasants, still bound by the legacy of feudal thought, could not fully grasp the idea of collective ownership. They longed for land, not for socialism. The revolution promised them liberation but offered it in forms they did not yet understand — cooperatives, collective farms, and nationalized estates. The landlords had fled, but the structure of rural

consciousness remained. Many peasants viewed the new government as distant, an authority of city workers rather than their own creation. The countryside, which in Russia had become a stronghold of the revolution after the land decree, in Hungary became a neutral or even hostile territory. This division between town and country weakened the republic from its very roots.

In the cities, the proletariat displayed heroism beyond measure. The workers of Budapest kept production alive without profit, fought in the Red Army, and maintained order through their councils. But the city alone cannot sustain a revolution. Industry depends on the peasantry for food, the countryside on the city for tools — their unity is the material foundation of socialism. Without it, the revolution becomes a body without blood. The Hungarian workers fought bravely, yet they stood alone, cut off from the great mass of the people whose support might have made the republic unbreakable.

The external invasion merely exposed what internal division had already prepared. The imperialist armies of Romania and Czechoslovakia struck from without, but their success was assured by the lack of unity within. The peasants did not rise to defend the revolution; many even welcomed the return of the old order, deceived by promises of stability and land. The bourgeoisie and reactionary officers, long hidden, emerged from exile to collaborate with the invaders. When the Red Army collapsed from hunger and exhaustion, the revolution had no reserves to draw upon. A revolution can face invasion if it has a nation behind it; Hungary had courage, but not yet a nation of workers and peasants bound together by common socialist thought.

From its fall emerged one of the great lessons of the revolutionary era: socialism cannot triumph by decree or by example alone — it must grow from the deep roots of class consolidation. The workers' state must not only seize power but build its social foundation before confronting the full power of imperialism. Lenin understood this necessity in Russia, where the early years of the revolution were devoted not only to war but to the creation of new social relations — the education of the masses, the alliance with the peasants, and the patient reconstruction of production. Without such a base, even the most devoted revolutionaries can be overwhelmed by external pressure.

The defeat of the Hungarian Soviet Republic also revealed another truth: that the revolution cannot rely on the sympathy of international reformists or the neutrality of imperialism. Every attempt to create socialism in one country will face not passive opposition but active war. Therefore, the strength of the workers' state must be internal, not dependent on diplomacy or foreign aid. It must rest on the unity, consciousness, and organization of the workers and peasants themselves.

When the counter-revolution triumphed, Hungary was plunged into darkness. The "White Terror" unleashed by Admiral Horthy's forces murdered thousands of workers, communists, and peasants who had supported the republic. The prisons filled, the unions were crushed, and the land was restored to the landlords. Yet even in defeat, the Hungarian Revolution left behind a legacy of unbroken thought. It had proven that the workers and peasants could take

power, even in a small and backward country, and that their attempt to build socialism could shake the imperial order of Europe to its core.

The fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic thus became both a warning and a lesson. It warned that revolution without class unity is vulnerable, and it taught that socialism must first consolidate its social base before challenging the global power of capital. The idea of proletarian dictatorship cannot survive in isolation; it must be supported by a vast alliance of labor that includes the peasantry, the poor, and the oppressed of every class and nation.

Though defeated, the Hungarian Soviet Republic did not vanish from history. Its brief existence burned like a beacon, showing that the struggle for socialism was not confined to Russia but was a living world movement. Its defeat was temporary; its lesson eternal: before the workers' state can confront the armies of imperialism, it must first conquer the contradictions within — by uniting all who labor under the banner of collective power and building a foundation so deep that no blockade, invasion, or betrayal can uproot it.

## The Chinese Revolution Before 1949

The thunder of the October Revolution in Russia echoed across the vast lands of Asia, reaching the awakening giant of China with transformative force. For centuries, China had been subjugated under the twin yokes of feudalism and imperialism. The Qing dynasty had fallen in 1911, but the so-called republic that followed was a republic in name only. The landlords and warlords divided the countryside among themselves, the cities lay in the grip of foreign capital, and the people endured hunger and humiliation under the shadow of imperial powers. The victory of the Russian workers and peasants in 1917 broke the illusion that such domination was unchangeable. It proved that even a backward and oppressed people could overthrow the old order and begin to build a new society based on labor rather than exploitation.

The example of October awakened in China a new thought — that liberation was not to be begged from the imperialists or the native bourgeoisie but seized by the workers and peasants themselves. In the treaty ports and factories, in the schools and villages, the revolutionary idea spread like a flame carried by word of mouth, through newspapers, study circles, and translations of Marxist and Bolshevik writings. The young intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement of 1919 — born out of anger at China's humiliation in the Versailles Treaty, which handed German concessions to Japan — turned their protest into a search for a new system of thought. They rejected both the decaying feudal traditions and the false promises of liberal reform. In the writings of Marx and Lenin, they found a way to understand not only China's national subjugation but also its social structure.

The Comintern, founded by Lenin in 1919 as the organ of world revolution, played a decisive role in this awakening. It recognized in China not merely a national question but a revolutionary one — a land where the contradictions of colonialism and class oppression were intertwined. For Lenin, the liberation of colonial peoples was inseparable from the

struggle of the world proletariat. Thus, the Comintern called upon the workers and peasants of Asia to join hands with the international labor movement, not as subordinates to Europe, but as equal fighters in the world struggle against imperialism. This message resonated deeply in China, where the humiliation of foreign domination had long been felt as a national wound.

In the early 1920s, Chinese students and workers who had studied or worked in Soviet Russia returned home carrying the ideas of the revolution. Among them were the future founders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), who saw in Lenin's thought a framework capable of uniting the struggle for national liberation with that of class emancipation. They understood that the fight against imperialism could not succeed unless it destroyed the feudal order within and the capitalist powers without. The Comintern encouraged the formation of communist groups in Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan, and other cities, guiding them toward the creation of a single party rooted in the working class.

At the same time, the Russian Revolution inspired not only intellectuals but also the toiling masses. In the cities, the nascent industrial proletariat — small but militant — began to organize strikes demanding better wages and working conditions. In the countryside, the peasants, long bound by debt and servitude to landlords, began to form associations for self-defense. The revolutionary idea that the land should belong to those who till it began to spread. The unity of workers and peasants — a cornerstone of Lenin's revolutionary theory — found its first echoes in Chinese soil.

The Comintern's influence helped the young Chinese revolutionaries see that their struggle was part of a global process. The imperial powers that plundered China were the same that had sent armies against Soviet Russia and blockaded the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The Chinese revolution thus emerged not as an isolated national movement, but as part of the world wave unleashed by 1917 — the uprising of the oppressed against the world system of imperialism.

Yet China's conditions were unique. Its bourgeoisie was weak and dependent on foreign capital, its landlords were ancient and powerful, and its working class was still small. The revolution would therefore have to be not a simple repetition of the Russian path but a creative adaptation of Marxism-Leninism to the realities of a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society. The early communists understood this, but they also understood that without the alliance of the workers and peasants, no revolution in China could survive.

Thus, from the very beginning, the Chinese revolutionary movement carried two intertwined banners: the banner of national independence and the banner of social liberation. The October Revolution had shown that these aims were not separate but united — that the struggle against imperialism and the struggle against capitalism were one and the same. Under the influence of Lenin's thought and the guidance of the Comintern, the Chinese workers and peasants began to see themselves not as victims of fate but as agents of history.

Their awakening marked the beginning of a new era — the transformation of the Chinese people from an object of imperialist plunder into a subject of world revolution. What had

begun as an echo of October would soon become one of its greatest tests: could the alliance of workers and peasants triumph in a land still bound by centuries of feudal domination and foreign control?

The years 1925 to 1927 marked both the first great rise and the first great tragedy of the Chinese Revolution. The revolutionary energy that had been building since the May Fourth Movement erupted in the form of strikes, demonstrations, and armed uprisings across the country. Workers seized factories, peasants rose against the landlords, and students filled the streets demanding the end of imperialist domination. The anti-imperialist movement, born from the humiliation of foreign control, began to fuse with the class struggle of the workers and peasants. It was a moment when China stood at the edge of transformation — when the victory of socialism seemed possible. Yet, in that decisive moment, the revolution was betrayed not only by the open enemies of the working class, but also by those who, in the name of "unity," bound it to the bourgeoisie.

The Comintern, now under Stalin's direction after Lenin's death, misread the character of the Chinese situation. Lenin had always insisted that the struggle for national liberation in colonial and semi-colonial countries must be led by the working class, allied with the peasants, and independent of the national bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie in such nations, tied by a thousand threads to foreign capital and domestic exploitation, could not carry the revolution to its end. But Stalin, seeking quick diplomatic success and anxious to expand Soviet influence, imposed a mechanical policy upon the Chinese communists — the "bloc with the bourgeoisie." He ordered the young Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to join the Kuomintang (KMT), the bourgeois-nationalist party founded by Sun Yat-sen, and to subordinate its independent activity to the KMT leadership.

This policy was fatal. The KMT, though it spoke in the name of national unity and anti-imperialism, was in essence a party of the bourgeoisie and landlords. After Sun Yat-sen's death, it fell under the control of Chiang Kai-shek, a man whose loyalty to capital and fear of the masses were absolute. While the Communists, under Comintern orders, helped to organize and strengthen the KMT from within — training its soldiers, organizing its unions, and mobilizing the masses for its cause — Chiang prepared to destroy them. The very successes of the Communists in arousing the workers and peasants terrified the bourgeois elements within the KMT, who feared that the revolution was slipping beyond their control.

The revolutionary wave reached its height in 1925–1926. In Canton, Shanghai, and Wuhan, the workers organized mass strikes that paralyzed foreign capital and shook the colonial powers. The May Thirtieth Movement of 1925, sparked by the killing of Chinese workers by British police in Shanghai, united millions under anti-imperialist slogans. The workers' movement, guided by Communist organizers, began to create its own organs of power — factory committees, unions, and councils. In the countryside, peasants began to seize land, drive out landlords, and form associations that challenged local authority. The revolution had entered its social stage; it was no longer merely a national movement but a class uprising.

Yet just as the revolution deepened, Stalin's policy demanded restraint. The Comintern instructed the CCP to hold back the radical demands of the workers and peasants so as not to

frighten the bourgeois allies. The Communists were told that the KMT represented the "revolutionary bourgeoisie" and that unity must be preserved at all costs. This unity was a chain. The CCP was ordered to dissolve its independent armed forces, to refrain from confiscating land, and to surrender leadership of the movement to Chiang Kai-shek. The KMT's army, trained and organized with Communist participation, marched northward in 1926–1927 in what was called the "Northern Expedition" — ostensibly to unify China, but in reality to consolidate bourgeois power under Chiang's command.

In Shanghai, the climax of the revolution unfolded. The workers, inspired by the success of the Northern Expedition and believing that the time for liberation had come, rose in mass insurrection in March 1927. They took control of the city, defeated the warlord forces, and established workers' councils. The red flag flew over Shanghai — the greatest industrial center of China — and for a moment it seemed that the revolution might triumph. But while the workers celebrated, Chiang Kai-shek prepared his betrayal. Supported by foreign capitalists, landlords, and the bourgeois press, he entered the city and unleashed a massacre. The Kuomintang armies, aided by gangs of hired thugs and police, slaughtered thousands of workers, communists, and union leaders. The streets of Shanghai ran red with the blood of those who had believed in unity.

The Comintern's orders to the CCP were still to "maintain the alliance" and "trust Chiang Kai-shek." Even after the massacre, Stalin refused to allow the Chinese Communists to break openly with the Kuomintang. He insisted on the same policy with the so-called "Left KMT" in Wuhan, which soon repeated the betrayal. In city after city, the Communist movement was crushed. The workers who had fought for liberation were disarmed, the peasants abandoned, and the party driven underground.

The tragedy of 1925–1927 was the result not of the weakness of the Chinese people, but of a false policy imposed from above — a policy that subordinated the revolutionary movement of the working class to the bourgeoisie. Stalin's mechanical interpretation of Marxism, stripped of Lenin's living revolutionary spirit, reduced strategy to obedience and thought to formulas. In place of Lenin's principle — that the workers must lead the struggle for national liberation through independent class power — Stalin demanded submission to the so-called "progressive" bourgeoisie. The result was catastrophe.

The defeat of the Shanghai workers and the destruction of the urban Communist movement marked the end of the revolution's first great wave. Thousands of revolutionaries were killed; the survivors fled to the countryside or into exile. The bourgeois republic under Chiang Kai-shek was established on the corpses of the workers and peasants who had made the revolution possible.

Yet even in defeat, the Chinese Revolution did not die. From the ruins of 1927 arose a new understanding — that socialism in China could not be built through alliances with the bourgeoisie or through obedience to mechanical directives. It would have to grow from the depths of China's own reality, from the unity of the workers and peasants, independent of the ruling classes and their parties. The blood of Shanghai taught the same lesson that Berlin and

Budapest had already written: that the bourgeoisie, no matter its words, will always betray the revolution, and that socialism must rely only on the organized strength of labor itself.

In the aftermath of the 1927 defeat, the center of the Chinese Revolution shifted from the cities to the countryside. The working class of the great industrial centers had been decimated, their unions crushed, their councils destroyed. Yet the revolution's strength did not vanish; it retreated into the villages, where hundreds of millions of peasants, long oppressed by landlords and usurers, still lived under conditions of medieval exploitation. It was in the soil of these villages, not the asphalt of the cities, that the next stage of China's revolutionary struggle would take root.

The Chinese peasantry was not merely a passive mass, as the bourgeois and reformist thinkers claimed. Beneath the apparent submission of the countryside lay centuries of suffering and accumulated rage. The landlords, allied with the warlords and foreign merchants, extracted the wealth of the peasantry through rents, taxes, and debt. Famines swept through the land, even as grain was exported to pay for foreign loans. For the peasant, the state was not a distant abstraction — it was the landlord's tax collector, the warlord's soldier, and the usurer's agent. When the revolution's message reached the villages, it met a people already prepared by hunger and injustice to rise.

Lenin's thought provided the key to transforming this rural fury into revolutionary power. He had shown in Russia that the working class, though numerically small, could lead the peasantry if it championed their immediate interests — the demand for land and liberation from feudal bondage. The alliance of workers and peasants was not a tactical convenience but a historical necessity. The workers could not overthrow capitalism without the support of the peasantry, and the peasants could not free themselves from feudalism without the leadership of the working class. Together, they formed the revolutionary majority of humanity.

In China, this alliance could have been the foundation of a genuine socialist base if correctly applied. The CCP, after 1927, began to understand that its survival depended on winning the peasants not through abstract slogans but through concrete acts — land reform, protection from the landlords, and the creation of local organs of self-rule. The experience of the Russian Revolution offered a model: the immediate confiscation of the landlords' estates and the distribution of land to those who worked it. But unlike the Russian Bolsheviks, who carried out such measures with the support of an organized working-class state, the Chinese communists faced a fragmented land dominated by armed warlords and foreign interests.

Had the Comintern and the CCP leadership, free from Stalin's rigid dogma, fully embraced Lenin's principle of worker-peasant unity, the revolution might have established strong rural bases earlier, before the KMT consolidated its control. Instead, under Stalin's influence, the CCP vacillated — first bound to the bourgeoisie through the "bloc" policy, and then, after defeat, thrust suddenly toward peasant revolt without adequate preparation. The result was a series of isolated uprisings — heroic but scattered — that were easily crushed by Chiang Kai-shek's forces.

Yet even these failed risings revealed the immense revolutionary potential of the Chinese peasantry. In Hunan, Hubei, and Jiangxi, peasants formed associations, seized land, and attacked landlord militias. Reports from the period describe villages that for the first time governed themselves, holding assemblies where poor peasants voted to abolish rents and debts. These movements, though local and often spontaneous, reflected the same current of thought that had animated the Russian peasants in 1917 — that the land should belong to those who till it, and that the exploitation of man by man must end.

Lenin had warned that without a firm alliance between workers and peasants, no revolution in a backward country could endure. The working class provides political consciousness, the peasantry provides numbers and energy; their unity transforms rebellion into power. In China, the peasantry was not only the majority but the true foundation of the nation's labor. If the revolution had placed them at its heart from the beginning — arming them, organizing them, and linking their struggle directly with that of the workers — it could have built a stable base of power, even amid foreign encirclement.

The early experiments of the CCP in rural soviets, particularly in southern China, pointed in this direction. When workers and peasants organized their own councils, redistributed land, and defended themselves through armed struggle, they created the embryo of a new state — not bourgeois, not feudal, but proletarian in content. These local soviets, though fragile, were the first true organs of people's power in China. They proved that even in a semi-feudal, semi-colonial land, Lenin's idea of the worker-peasant alliance was not a theory to be imported from abroad, but a living principle born of China's own conditions.

The tragedy of the 1920s was that this potential was not yet fully realized. The revolution had been forced into the countryside not by strategic design, but by defeat. Yet within this retreat lay the seed of future victory. The peasants, once seen as backward and inert, emerged as the guardians of the revolutionary flame. Their struggle showed that the road to socialism in China would not begin in the cities, as in Russia, but in the villages — through the awakening of those who worked the land, guided by the workers' thought and by the vision of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

Had the early Communist movement been allowed to apply Lenin's principles freely — unhampered by the mechanical dictates of Stalinism — it could have forged a revolutionary power rooted deeply in the masses, unshakable by bourgeois betrayal or imperialist aggression. The lesson of this period was clear: socialism in China would rise not from alliances with the bourgeoisie, but from the unity of the two great forces of labor — the worker and the peasant — bound together in common struggle against all forms of exploitation.

The years that followed the defeat of 1927 were marked by immense suffering, retreat, and transformation for the Chinese revolutionary movement. Driven from the cities, where the proletariat had been massacred and the unions destroyed, the Communist Party was forced to seek survival in the most remote corners of the countryside. The remnants of the workers' movement — those who had escaped death or imprisonment — joined with peasant militants in the southern provinces to continue the struggle. What began as a political movement

rooted in the factories and the councils of workers now turned into a military movement of survival. Out of necessity, the revolution transformed itself — but in doing so, it also lost part of its original character.

The new conditions demanded defense above all else. The Kuomintang regime, supported by imperialist powers, launched campaign after campaign to annihilate the Communist bases. To resist these assaults, the Party and the Red Army became inseparable. The Red Army, originally formed as a means of defending the peasant soviets, soon became the main organ of the movement. The logic of continuous warfare — encirclement, retreat, and survival — imposed upon the revolution a structure of command that replaced political deliberation with military discipline. Under siege, the revolution had to become an army before it could again become a government.

This transformation reached its height during the Long March of 1934–1935, one of the most extraordinary feats of endurance in revolutionary history. Surrounded and outnumbered, the Red Army undertook a retreat of more than nine thousand kilometers across mountains, swamps, and deserts to escape the encirclement of Chiang Kai-shek's forces. Tens of thousands perished from hunger, cold, and battle. Yet the march was not merely a retreat; it was the migration of an entire revolutionary movement, carrying its banners, its wounded, and its dreams through the wilderness. It preserved the physical existence of the Communist Party when all else seemed lost.

But the cost was heavy. The Long March, for all its heroism, completed the transformation of the revolution from a mass workers' movement into a mobile military force. The Party, once centered in the proletarian centers of Shanghai, Wuhan, and Canton, was now cut off from the industrial heart of the nation. Its base lay among the peasantry, scattered across rural and mountain regions. The Red Army's survival required strict discipline and centralized command — conditions that, while necessary in war, diminished the democratic and proletarian character of the movement. Political debate gave way to obedience; the revolutionary councils of workers and peasants were replaced by military orders.

Lenin had warned that the strength of the workers' state depends not only on arms but on class character — on the active participation of the masses in governance. In the Russian Revolution, even during civil war, the soviets remained the foundation of power. In China, however, the destruction of the urban proletariat left a void that the Party could not fill. The military apparatus became the bearer of the revolution's continuity. Over time, this reliance on armed organization over class organization began to shape the Party's structure and thought.

During the Long March, political authority became concentrated in the hands of a few commanders whose prestige grew through military endurance rather than class leadership. The Party's survival required unity, but that unity often meant suppression of dissent. The revolutionary movement, once guided by the collective will of workers and peasants, became dependent on a hierarchical military discipline. The idea of proletarian dictatorship — the conscious rule of the workers — gave way to the rule of the Party through the army.

This militarization of the revolution was not a betrayal by intent, but a product of desperate conditions. Surrounded by enemies, cut off from the working class, and driven into regions where literacy was scarce and production minimal, the revolution could not develop its democratic forms. Yet this necessity carried long-term consequences. The habits of military command became habits of governance; the structure of the army became the structure of the Party. When the time came to rebuild, the political life of the movement was already shaped by the spirit of command rather than the spirit of collective decision.

Still, the Long March preserved the flame of revolution. Without it, the Communist movement in China would have perished entirely. It carried with it the traditions of sacrifice, courage, and the determination to continue the struggle despite overwhelming odds. But it also marked a turning point — the moment when the Chinese Revolution ceased to be primarily proletarian in form and became instead a peasant-based military movement. The working class had been broken, and its political leadership replaced by a hierarchy forged in war.

From this contradiction would arise the future course of Chinese socialism: a state born from revolution but organized as an army, a government carried to power by peasants yet ruled in the name of the workers. The Long March thus ensured both the survival and the transformation of the revolution — it preserved its body but changed its soul.

The victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949 was one of the most momentous events of the twentieth century. It marked the end of a century of imperialist domination, landlord tyranny, and warlord chaos. The foreign powers were expelled, the landlords overthrown, and the banner of revolution was raised over a nation of hundreds of millions. For the workers and peasants of China, it was a triumph of decades of struggle and sacrifice — the culmination of uprisings, marches, and wars fought against both foreign oppression and domestic exploitation. Yet behind this victory lay a profound contradiction. The state that emerged from 1949 bore the outward signs of socialism — the red flag, the abolition of private capital, and the rhetoric of proletarian power — but in essence, it was not Lenin's socialism. It was a new form of state power: a bureaucratic command system molded by the influence of Stalinism.

Lenin's conception of socialism was founded on the self-rule of the workers and peasants through their own councils. It was a transitional form of power meant to abolish class distinctions and, in time, the state itself. For Lenin, socialism was not a system of orders from above, but the organized initiative of the masses from below — a living democracy of labor. Stalinism, by contrast, replaced this thought with its opposite: the domination of the state over the workers, the substitution of party bureaucracy for proletarian rule, and the preservation of hierarchy in the name of efficiency and discipline. Under Stalin, the workers' state ceased to be an instrument of liberation and became an instrument of command.

In China, the conditions of war and isolation had prepared the ground for this transformation even before victory. The prolonged militarization of the revolution, the destruction of the urban working class, and the concentration of authority within the Red Army all shaped the character of the new state. When the People's Republic was proclaimed in 1949, the

Communist Party stood not as the expression of the organized will of the workers and peasants, but as a centralized machine commanding them. The people had fought heroically, yet the structure of power they had created was not truly theirs.

The revolution's slogans spoke of the alliance of workers and peasants, but its practice increasingly reflected the command of the Party bureaucracy. The new state nationalized industry, confiscated the land of the landlords, and initiated great campaigns of social reconstruction. Yet these measures were carried out from above, as administrative decrees rather than collective decisions of the masses. Workers became functionaries in state-owned enterprises, and peasants were pressed into cooperatives under orders rather than persuasion. The soviets that Lenin had envisioned as schools of popular governance did not arise; instead, the Party apparatus filled every space of political life.

This was not the realization of Marx's and Lenin's communism, but its distortion. In form, the capitalist class was abolished; in function, a new ruling stratum emerged — a bureaucracy that claimed to act on behalf of the proletariat but in reality stood above it. The workers no longer ruled; they were ruled in their name. The dictatorship of the proletariat, which in Lenin's thought was to be the most democratic form of power in history, became in China, as in Stalin's Russia, a dictatorship over the proletariat.

The consequences of this transformation were immense. The revolutionary energy of the masses, which had once built the Red Army and sustained the Long March, was now confined within a rigid structure of command. Initiative from below was stifled; criticism was treated as disloyalty. The creative participation of workers and peasants in shaping their own future — the essence of socialism — was replaced by obedience to the Party line. The bureaucracy, like all ruling castes, sought stability over transformation, order over freedom. In this way, socialism ceased to be a movement toward the disappearance of the state and became a system for preserving its power.

The tragedy of the Chinese Revolution was therefore not that it failed to overthrow capitalism — for it did — but that it replaced one form of domination with another. It exchanged the exploitation of capital for the command of bureaucracy. The worker remained subordinate, not to the private owner, but to the Party official; the peasant remained dependent, not on the landlord, but on the state planner. The ideals of Marx and Lenin — collective ownership, direct democracy, and the eventual disappearance of coercive power — were replaced by a system of discipline and control that justified itself through the language of socialism while negating its content.

The victory of 1949, while breaking the chains of imperialism, thus carried within it a contradiction that would define China's path for decades to come. The revolution had liberated the nation but not yet the working class. The Party, forged in war and modeled after Stalin's apparatus, could not yet transform itself into an instrument of true proletarian democracy. It ruled in the name of the workers but feared their independent power.

In this, the Chinese experience confirmed once more the central lesson of the twentieth century: that socialism cannot be imposed from above, even by those who claim to speak for

the people. It must be built from below, through the conscious and organized participation of the masses themselves. The revolution in China, like those before it in Germany and Hungary, revealed both the greatness of popular struggle and the dangers of its distortion when the spirit of Lenin's communism is replaced by the system of Stalinist command.

Thus, while 1949 ended a chapter of foreign domination, it opened another — one in which the name of socialism was used to justify a new hierarchy. True communism, as Marx, Engels, and Lenin conceived it, remained unrealized: a future yet to be built, when the workers and peasants of China and the world reclaim socialism as their own creation, not as a structure of power over them, but as the free association of equals, organized for the common good.

## Post-War Europe and the Spread of Socialist Governments (1945–1949)

The end of the Second World War brought both devastation and hope to Europe. Cities lay in ruins, millions were dead or displaced, and the old order that had dominated the continent for generations stood discredited. Fascism — the most brutal expression of capitalist decay — had collapsed under its own contradictions and under the blows of the Red Army and the resistance movements of workers and peasants. From the ashes of war, a new possibility emerged: that the workers of Europe, hardened by struggle and united by suffering, might rebuild society upon socialist foundations. The fall of fascism seemed to open the door to a new epoch — an epoch of reconstruction not for profit, but for human need.

The war had torn away the masks of bourgeois civilization. The same capitalist powers that had once promised democracy and progress had spawned fascism as their last defense against the working class. Mussolini and Hitler had risen with the financial and political support of the bourgeoisie, who preferred dictatorship to revolution. But the monstrous forces they unleashed could not be controlled. The world capitalist system, having plunged humanity into two global wars within a single generation, stood exposed before all. The destruction of fascism was thus not merely a military victory; it was a social and moral collapse of the old order.

In Eastern Europe, where fascism had left its deepest scars, the workers and peasants rose first. In Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary, the collapse of Nazi occupation created a vacuum of power. The old monarchies and landlord classes had fled or disintegrated. The resistance movements — often organized under the banner of national liberation — were led by communists and socialists who had fought side by side with partisans, workers, and peasants. These movements had grown not as foreign impositions but from within, born of necessity in the struggle against fascism.

Across the continent, the working class, long suppressed by both fascist terror and capitalist exploitation, began to organize itself anew. In Italy and France, workers occupied factories, formed councils, and demanded control over production. In the liberated territories of Eastern

Europe, revolutionary committees emerged, seizing land, expropriating collaborators, and organizing local self-governance. For a brief and electrifying moment, the vision of a workers' Europe — united in equality and fraternity — appeared within reach. The atmosphere of 1945 was one of revolutionary anticipation. The people, exhausted by war, desired peace; but they also demanded justice — not the justice of courts and treaties, but the justice of social transformation.

The Soviet Union, which had borne the greatest burden of the war and had emerged victorious, stood at the center of this transformation. To millions, it appeared as the living proof that socialism could defeat fascism and survive. The Red Army's advance across Eastern Europe brought not only liberation from Nazi rule but also the possibility of a new social order. Workers' parties gained strength, land reform swept through the countryside, and factories were nationalized. In the first months after the war, spontaneous revolutionary initiatives erupted everywhere. Peasants took back the land, workers took control of production, and many believed that the socialist dream of Marx and Lenin was finally being realized across Europe.

The hope of 1945 was immense. It was a hope rooted in blood and labor — the belief that the sacrifices of war could be redeemed only through the creation of a society free from exploitation. For a brief moment, the boundaries between nations seemed secondary to the unity of purpose among the workers and peasants of all lands. Across the ruins of fascism, the slogan that had once echoed from the barricades of 1917 returned: "Workers of all countries, unite!"

But this new beginning carried within it dangers that few yet perceived. The revolutionary enthusiasm of the people was soon to meet the reality of international politics, the ambitions of power, and the shadow of Stalinism. The victory of socialism in Eastern Europe was real in form — the old ruling classes were gone — but its content would soon be shaped by forces far from the councils and factories of the workers themselves. What began as genuine liberation carried within it the seeds of a new form of domination.

For the moment, however, the workers of Europe believed that history had turned in their favor. Fascism was dead, the bourgeoisie discredited, and the idea of socialism alive in the hearts of millions. The world seemed ready to rise from the ruins of war into a new order of peace and equality — the order for which so many had fought and died.

The liberation of Eastern Europe in 1944–1945 was one of the most significant achievements of the anti-fascist struggle. The Red Army, advancing westward from Stalingrad and Kursk, broke the Nazi war machine and freed countless peoples from occupation and annihilation. To the workers and peasants of these lands, the soldiers of the Soviet Union appeared at first as comrades — the living embodiment of the victory of socialism over fascism. In many villages, they were welcomed not as conquerors but as liberators, brothers in the same cause. Yet what began as liberation soon transformed into subordination. The genuine revolutionary aspirations of the European peoples were gradually absorbed, reshaped, and constrained within the framework of Stalin's state power.

The entry of the Red Army into Eastern Europe carried with it two currents: one born from the October Revolution, the other from its distortion. The first was the revolutionary thought of Marx, Engels, and Lenin — the promise of workers' and peasants' self-rule, of international solidarity and freedom from exploitation. The second was the bureaucratic system that had arisen in the Soviet Union under Stalin — centralized control, suppression of debate, and subordination of all movements to the dictates of a single party hierarchy. The peoples of Eastern Europe expected the first; they received the second.

In the months following liberation, spontaneous popular movements emerged everywhere. Workers' councils were formed, land was seized from the great estates, and local committees took control of production and distribution. In many regions, communists, socialists, and non-party workers cooperated to rebuild life from below. The mood was one of collective effort, not of submission. But these movements, arising organically from the people, were viewed with suspicion by the Soviet authorities. The Stalinist leadership in Moscow did not trust the independent initiative of the masses. It feared that a genuine workers' democracy in Eastern Europe might become an alternative model to its own system of bureaucratic rule.

Thus, even as the Soviet Union proclaimed itself the protector of socialism, it began systematically to dismantle the independent organs of popular power that had sprung up in the wake of fascism's collapse. The local councils were replaced by "People's Governments" under the strict supervision of Moscow. The revolutionary parties were merged into single "fronts" controlled by Stalinist cadres trained in obedience rather than in creative thought. Land reform, nationalization, and reconstruction were carried out — but as administrative measures, not as acts of collective will. The new states that arose in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria bore the outward forms of socialism — state ownership, planned economy, and one-party rule — but their inner structure reflected the same bureaucratic centralism that had already suffocated Soviet democracy in the 1930s.

The Red Army's presence ensured this transformation. In theory, it guaranteed the security of the revolution; in practice, it guaranteed Soviet domination. The local communist parties, instead of developing their own strategies based on national conditions, were compelled to follow the political line dictated from Moscow. This line prioritized loyalty over thought, conformity over creativity. The independence of the workers' movements — the very essence of Lenin's conception of internationalism — was replaced by subservience to the foreign policy needs of the Soviet state. The socialist reconstruction of Eastern Europe became less a work of the masses and more an extension of Stalin's geopolitical design.

In the early years, many honest communists believed they were continuing the revolutionary mission of 1917. They saw in the Red Army's victories the triumph of socialism over capitalism. Yet as the new regimes consolidated, it became clear that a new hierarchy was being built. The secret police replaced the councils, the Party replaced the workers, and the slogans of Marx and Lenin were used to justify policies that suppressed the very class they claimed to represent. The working class, whose courage had liberated the continent, found itself once again subject to orders — this time not from capitalists, but from bureaucrats.

The tragedy of this period lies in the confusion between socialism and state control. For the peoples of Eastern Europe, the revolution promised freedom: freedom from exploitation, from hunger, from war. What they received was stability enforced by command. The Stalinist model equated socialism with nationalization and one-party rule, ignoring that, for Lenin, socialism was first of all the self-government of the workers — the conscious control of production and society by those who labor. The state that was meant to disappear became instead permanent and absolute.

Thus, the socialist aspirations of millions — genuine, heartfelt, and born from the ruins of fascism — were transformed into systems of dependency upon the Soviet bureaucracy. These were not the internationalist relationships of comrades in struggle, but those of subordinates to a center of power. The governments of Eastern Europe became satellites, their revolutions contained within the orbit of Moscow's policy. The result was a form of socialism without liberation: a socialism of obedience, not of creation; of state command, not of workers' control.

The Red Army's victory had destroyed fascism, but the system that followed did not restore the emancipatory meaning of October. The revolutionary impulse of the people — the will to rebuild society in freedom and equality — was replaced by fear, bureaucracy, and silence. The same tragedy that had overtaken the Russian Revolution now spread across a continent. What had begun as the hope of socialist reconstruction was transformed into the expansion of Stalinist order — a triumph of state over people, of form over essence, of command over thought.

The years immediately following the war witnessed one of the greatest betrayals of the socialist idea in modern Europe. In the ruins of fascism, the workers of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany sought to rebuild their countries not through restoration of the old capitalist order, but through collective self-rule. In mines, factories, and transport hubs, they formed workers' councils — organs of direct management and solidarity, inspired by the example of the soviets of 1917. These councils were not imposed by any foreign force; they arose spontaneously, from the conviction that the people who produced the wealth of society must also guide its reconstruction. Yet their emergence alarmed the Stalinist bureaucracies, who saw in this movement the danger of a living socialism — a socialism from below.

In Poland, the workers' councils had roots even before 1945. Underground socialist and communist groups had fought the Nazis not only for national liberation but for a new social order. When the war ended, the workers immediately seized factories abandoned by the occupiers, restarted production under collective supervision, and established committees to manage distribution. These councils, organized through trade unions and neighborhood assemblies, coordinated with peasants' committees that redistributed land. For a brief moment, the idea of proletarian democracy — the control of production and society by the working class itself — seemed within reach.

But as the new "People's Government" consolidated under Soviet supervision, these independent organs were quickly brought to heel. The Communist Party, reorganized under

Moscow's direction, declared that "uncoordinated" local control threatened national unity. Party commissars were installed to "guide" the councils, transforming them from organs of self-management into mere extensions of state administration. Within two years, the councils' economic and political authority was stripped away. The trade unions were absorbed into the party apparatus; dissenting voices were silenced. The spontaneous energy of the Polish working class, which had rebuilt industry from the ruins, was replaced by rigid state control.

A similar process unfolded in Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak workers had a long tradition of socialist organization, and after liberation in 1945 they revived it with enthusiasm. In the industrial regions of Bohemia and Moravia, workers' committees took charge of production, often coordinating with local resistance fighters and socialist cooperatives. They operated with striking independence, electing their delegates, debating policy, and managing the factories that the fascists had abandoned. These committees embodied the democratic essence of socialism: the idea that those who labor collectively can also govern collectively.

Yet as in Poland, this flowering of proletarian democracy was short-lived. Under the pressure of Soviet occupation and the growing dominance of the Communist Party's central leadership, the councils were dissolved or absorbed into bureaucratic hierarchies. The so-called "National Front" government, which initially included socialists and trade unionists, became an instrument of the Stalinist party apparatus. When the Communist Party seized full control in 1948, it did so not as the culmination of workers' power, but as its negation. The councils that had been the true foundation of socialism were replaced by ministries, planning committees, and secret police. The revolution was nationalized, and with that nationalization came the suffocation of its democratic soul.

In East Germany, the workers' movement faced a similar fate, though under even more direct military and political control. The workers of Berlin, Leipzig, and the Ruhr had suffered enormously under fascism and the war, but they emerged with revolutionary spirit intact. In the immediate postwar years, they organized councils and trade unions that managed local reconstruction. These organizations demanded not merely economic recovery but also the establishment of a socialist democracy — councils of workers and peasants to replace the capitalist state. However, the Soviet occupation authority, determined to create a loyal buffer state, quickly suppressed this independent initiative. The German Communist Party, merged by Stalin's order with the Social Democrats into the Socialist Unity Party (SED), became the instrument of this suppression. The workers' councils were either dissolved or placed under party control. By 1949, when the German Democratic Republic was proclaimed, the workers no longer governed; they obeyed.

In all these countries, the same pattern unfolded: the revolution from below was replaced by the revolution from above. The workers who had fought fascism were denied the right to determine the new order they had made possible. Instead, they were placed under the command of bureaucratic elites who justified their rule in the name of socialism while destroying its substance. Factories and land were nationalized, but the working class was

excluded from real decision-making. Planning replaced participation; obedience replaced initiative.

This system — often called "bureaucratic socialism" — was socialism only in form, not in content. It abolished private capital but preserved hierarchy. It replaced the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist with the domination of the worker by the state functionary. The promise of Lenin's workers' democracy — councils directing production, freedom of debate within the proletariat, and the gradual disappearance of coercive authority — was transformed into its opposite. Under Stalinist rule, the state became eternal, the bureaucracy self-perpetuating.

The tragedy was not that the workers of Eastern Europe lacked courage or consciousness — they had shown both in abundance — but that their revolution was expropriated. What they had created in the spirit of solidarity was turned into a mechanism of command. The living energy of the working class was frozen into obedience, and socialism, instead of liberating labor, became another form of its subordination.

Yet beneath this imposed silence, the memory of the councils endured — a reminder that real socialism is not decreed by governments but created by workers themselves. The councils of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany, though destroyed, remained symbols of the true path: that of collective power, proletarian democracy, and the thought of Marx, Engels, and Lenin — a socialism built from below, not imposed from above.

The divide between Lenin's conception of socialism and the Stalinist system that arose after his death represents one of the deepest ruptures in the history of the revolutionary movement. It was not merely a conflict of personalities or of tactics, but of two fundamentally opposed social principles — the rule of the workers themselves versus the rule over the workers by a bureaucratic caste. In the name of Lenin, Stalin built a structure that inverted everything Lenin had fought for. Under the guise of "strengthening socialism," Stalin destroyed its very foundation: the self-government of the proletariat.

Lenin's thought, as expressed in his writings and in the early practice of the Soviet Republic, defined socialism as the conscious and collective control of society by the working class through its own organs — the soviets. The soviets were not parliaments or ministries; they were assemblies of workers, soldiers, and peasants who directly participated in governance. Lenin envisioned them as the instruments through which the state, as a separate force standing above society, would begin to disappear. For Lenin, socialism was not a new ruling apparatus but the process of dismantling all ruling apparatuses. The essence of the proletarian state was its temporary and transitional nature — it existed only to suppress the resistance of the bourgeoisie and to organize the economic and political life of the people until class distinctions disappeared.

Lenin's workers' state was meant to be the most democratic form of governance ever achieved. Its delegates were elected directly, subject to recall, and paid no more than the average worker. Administration was to become so simplified, so open to the participation of all, that "every cook could govern." Bureaucracy, in Lenin's view, was a relic of the

bourgeois order — a machinery of domination to be broken, not perpetuated. The task of socialism was to replace hierarchy with participation, passivity with initiative, and command with collective decision. The dictatorship of the proletariat, as Lenin conceived it, was not a dictatorship of a party over the people, but the self-rule of the workers organized as a class.

Stalinism transformed this vision into its opposite. Where Lenin sought to abolish bureaucracy, Stalin built an empire of it. The state, which under Lenin was to be temporary, became under Stalin permanent and absolute. The soviets, once the living organs of workers' power, were reduced to ceremonial bodies, their decisions dictated by the Party apparatus. The Communist Party itself ceased to be a collective of revolutionaries and became a machine of command. At every level, thought and initiative were replaced by discipline and obedience. The creative participation of the masses was declared unnecessary; the "party line" became truth.

This new structure — the fusion of party and state — was justified in the language of unity and security, but its real function was to preserve the privileges of the bureaucratic layer that had risen during the Civil War and the years of isolation. Stalinism claimed continuity with Lenin, but in reality, it was the negation of his work. Lenin's ideal of a workers' democracy disappearing into communism was replaced by a system of total control, in which every institution, from the trade unions to the soviets, became instruments of enforcement. The working class was no longer the subject of history but its object.

The contrast between Lenin's and Stalin's structures of power was evident not only in form but in spirit. Lenin viewed the proletariat as capable of governing, learning through participation, and correcting its own mistakes. Stalin viewed the masses as incapable, to be ruled by experts and disciplined by fear. Lenin trusted in education, persuasion, and democratic centralism as genuine debate within a unified revolutionary organization. Stalin replaced debate with decree, and democratic centralism with bureaucratic monolithism — centralism without democracy. The state that under Lenin had begun to disappear under Stalin became the master of all social life.

This reversal had profound consequences beyond Russia. It shaped the post-war regimes of Eastern Europe, China, and elsewhere, where socialism came to mean state ownership and one-party rule, not workers' power and social emancipation. The bureaucratic structure born under Stalin became a model exported by force or imitation — a system where every revolutionary movement was measured not by its fidelity to Marx's and Lenin's thought, but by its obedience to Moscow. The result was the spread of "socialist" states without socialist democracy — economies planned by ministries, not councils; societies ruled by officials, not by workers.

Lenin had warned of this danger even before his death. In his last writings, he expressed alarm at the growth of bureaucracy within the Soviet state and at the arrogance of officials who treated the people as subjects. He called for the revitalization of the soviets, for control from below, and for the removal of Stalin from power. His warnings went unheeded. The very forces he had feared triumphed, and the revolution he had led toward emancipation was transformed into a system of command and coercion.

The contrast between Lenin's workers' self-rule and Stalin's party-state control is thus the contrast between socialism as liberation and socialism as domination. Lenin's socialism was a bridge toward the disappearance of class and state; Stalin's socialism was the construction of a new class and a new state. The one pointed toward the free association of equals; the other built a hierarchy cloaked in the language of equality. The former trusted the people; the latter feared them.

In the end, what triumphed across much of the twentieth century under the name of socialism was not the thought of Lenin but its negation — a system that called itself proletarian while suppressing the proletariat, that spoke of revolution while enforcing obedience. Yet the memory of Lenin's idea — of workers' councils, of democracy from below, of a state meant to disappear — remained as a reminder that socialism's true content lies not in the command of the state, but in the self-rule of the people.

The experience of post-war Europe proved a truth that Marx, Engels, and Lenin had each declared in their own time: socialism cannot be brought to life through decree, conquest, or occupation. It cannot be imposed by foreign armies or maintained by administrative command. A socialist government, to be worthy of the name, must grow from the conscious activity and self-organization of the working class. When socialism becomes an export of state power instead of the expression of workers' power, it loses its revolutionary essence and becomes a new form of domination — socialism in words, but not in life.

The Red Army had crushed fascism, and for that, the workers of the world owed it gratitude. Yet liberation by force, however necessary in war, cannot substitute for liberation by the people themselves. The occupation of Eastern Europe after 1945 turned what could have been a new flowering of socialism into a system of dependency and control. The workers who had fought, suffered, and rebuilt their countries were denied the right to shape their own governments. Instead, new regimes were organized from above, modeled after Moscow's bureaucracy, and justified in the name of "proletarian internationalism." But this was not internationalism in Lenin's sense — the free cooperation of equals — it was subordination disguised as unity.

In each country, the same pattern repeated. Where workers' councils and local committees had arisen, they were suppressed. Where multiple socialist parties and trade unions existed, they were forced into single state-controlled organizations. Elections became rituals; parliaments, instruments of decree. The enthusiasm of 1945 — the spontaneous belief that the war's end would bring a new world of justice — was replaced by fear, conformity, and silence. The banner of socialism was flown by governments that did not trust the workers in whose name they ruled.

Lenin had taught that socialism requires the active participation of the working class in every sphere of life — political, economic, and cultural. It is not merely the transfer of ownership from private hands to the state, but the transformation of society through the awakening of human initiative. The state, in his view, was to serve as a temporary scaffold for the construction of a new order; it was to disappear as the people learned to govern themselves. In Eastern Europe, however, the state did not disappear — it expanded. The bureaucracy

grew, power centralized, and the workers became once more subordinates in a system they did not control.

No army, however well-intentioned, can create socialism for another people. Liberation cannot be imported. The revolution must be made by those who live it, who build it through their own councils, their own struggles, and their own consciousness. True socialism is not a matter of territory or alliance, but of class power — the self-organization of workers and peasants who collectively take command of their labor, their communities, and their destiny. When that power is absent, when the people are replaced by administrators, socialism becomes an empty shell — a name without substance.

The lesson of post-war Europe is therefore clear: socialism that begins as occupation ends as bureaucracy. The forced imposition of a "socialist" model from above may nationalize property, but it cannot socialize life. Real socialism cannot be handed down; it must rise from below. It must be built in the factories, in the fields, in the neighborhoods — wherever workers and peasants unite in free association. Only through their conscious organization can the old order be destroyed and a new one created, not through command, but through participation.

The revolutions of Eastern Europe after 1945 carried immense potential, yet their promise was buried beneath the weight of external control. Their history is a warning to all future movements: socialism imposed without freedom produces not liberation but submission. A workers' state cannot be established by another state; it must be born of the workers themselves.

When socialism is born from below, as Lenin foresaw, it is not a system of coercion but a movement toward freedom — the collective self-rule of those who labor, sustained by equality, solidarity, and the conscious will to transform the world. The future of socialism depends not on armies or governments, but on the awakening of this will in every country and every worker. Only then will the true internationalism of Marx, Engels, and Lenin be realized — a brotherhood of peoples, not of states; a world revolution of the working class, not a chain of bureaucracies.

## Lessons of the Early 20th Century: Revolution, Betrayal, and Renewal

The early twentieth century was the age when the world awoke to the possibility of liberation. From Petrograd to Berlin, from Budapest to Canton, from Shanghai to Warsaw, the oppressed rose against the order that had ruled humanity for centuries — the order of capital, empire, and hierarchy. These revolutions, though separated by geography and language, were united by a single essence: the struggle of workers and peasants to end the exploitation of man by man and to build a world founded on equality, cooperation, and collective power. They were not Russian, German, Hungarian, or Chinese in national character; they were international in substance — born from the same contradictions of capitalism and imperialism that enslaved all nations.

The October Revolution of 1917 had proven that the old world could be broken. It gave the working class a living example that capitalism was not eternal and that the people could rule without kings, parliaments, or capitalists. Its thunder echoed across continents, igniting uprisings in Europe and inspiring anti-colonial movements in Asia. In Germany, the Spartacists sought to extend the flame of October; in Hungary, the workers and peasants proclaimed their own soviet republic; in China, the youth and laborers turned from despair to revolutionary thought; in the factories and villages of every land, the idea of socialism became a living force.

What united all these movements was their clarity of purpose — their rejection of the entire capitalist system and their recognition that freedom for humanity required the destruction of imperial domination and private property alike. Each of these revolutions was not merely national, but international in aspiration. They saw that the struggle of the Russian worker, the German metal laborer, the Hungarian peasant, and the Chinese student were threads of one fabric — a single global uprising against the tyranny of capital and empire. The early twentieth century was therefore not simply a political era; it was the first collective attempt of humanity to rise as one class against its chains.

Yet these revolutions, though united in aim, were divided in fate. Their defeat did not come from the strength of capitalism alone but from within the revolutionary movement itself. The same century that gave birth to the greatest hopes of humanity also witnessed their betrayal — through reformism, Stalinism, and isolation.

Reformism appeared as the first enemy within. In Germany, the Social Democratic Party, which had once claimed to speak for the working class, became the defender of the bourgeois order. When faced with the choice between revolution and capitalism, it chose capitalism and drowned the revolution in blood. Its leaders, Ebert and Noske, called themselves socialists while ordering the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. This betrayal destroyed the most advanced workers' movement in Europe and revealed that reformism — the belief that capitalism could be gradually transformed into socialism through parliament and compromise — was in truth the servant of the old system. Reformism disarmed the working class by substituting obedience for struggle, legality for revolution, and thus prepared the path for fascism and war.

The second and perhaps deeper betrayal came from Stalinism, which transformed Lenin's living thought into a doctrine of control. Under Stalin, the dictatorship of the proletariat was replaced by the dictatorship of the Party bureaucracy. The state that was to disappear became permanent; the soviets that were to express the will of the workers became instruments of command. Stalinism betrayed the international character of socialism, turning the Comintern from a revolutionary organization into an arm of Soviet foreign policy. In China, this betrayal took the form of the "bloc with the bourgeoisie," which led to the massacre of the Shanghai workers in 1927. In Hungary and Eastern Europe, it produced the substitution of liberation by occupation — socialism imposed by decree, without the participation of the people. Stalinism strangled the revolutions it claimed to defend by replacing initiative from below with obedience to authority.

The third factor — isolation — was the soil in which these betrayals grew. The Russian Revolution, victorious in 1917, stood alone in a hostile world. The revolutions in Germany and Hungary were crushed; the rest of Europe remained under capitalist rule. Surrounded by enemies, the workers' state in Russia was forced to defend itself militarily and economically, and in this siege, the bureaucratic layer that became Stalinism took root. The failure of the international revolution condemned the Russian workers to isolation and their government to degeneration. Without the support of revolutions abroad, socialism in one country became not a stage of progress but a justification for retreat and repression.

Thus, the early revolutions perished not because the idea of socialism was false, but because the conditions of its realization were deformed by betrayal and isolation. The reformists betrayed socialism by binding it to capitalism; the Stalinists betrayed it by binding it to the state. Both denied the essence of communism — that the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself.

Yet even in defeat, these revolutions left behind more than ruins. They left lessons and examples — the courage of the Spartacists, the endurance of the Hungarian workers, the heroism of the Chinese peasants, the thought of Lenin and Luxemburg that continues to illuminate the path forward. They proved that whenever capitalism collapses under its contradictions, the workers will again raise the banner of socialism. The question is not whether the revolution will return, but whether it will return free of the deformities that once destroyed it.

To understand the lessons of the twentieth century, one must return to the essential thought of Lenin — not as distorted by Stalin's bureaucracy or simplified by reformists, but as it truly stood: socialism as the self-government of the workers. Lenin's contribution to the history of revolution was not merely in leading the overthrow of the old state, but in defining what should replace it. His socialism was not a doctrine of command but of participation; not a system of orders but a structure of collective power. He sought to make real, in the life of society, Marx's vision that the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves.

For Lenin, socialism was the practical form of this emancipation. The revolution was not an end in itself but a means — the destruction of the old state so that the producers of society could govern directly through their own organs. In *State and Revolution*, written on the eve of October 1917, Lenin described the workers' state as "a commune-type democracy," far more democratic than any bourgeois republic, where the people would themselves exercise authority, not through representatives who ruled over them, but through councils of delegates who lived and worked among them. These soviets were not temporary instruments of insurrection but the very foundation of a new social order.

The essence of Lenin's thought lies in this idea: socialism is the organized self-rule of the working class. The state under socialism is not a new master, but the organized strength of the oppressed in the process of abolishing all oppression. Its goal is not permanence, but disappearance — as class divisions are overcome, the state's coercive functions lose their necessity, and society governs itself freely. Lenin's socialism was therefore dynamic and

transitional. It aimed not to create a new hierarchy, but to dismantle hierarchy altogether through the conscious participation of all workers in the management of production and administration.

The Communist Party, in Lenin's view, was not to be a substitute for the working class, but its instrument — a vanguard whose task was to educate, organize, and guide, never to command. The party was to serve the revolution by clarifying its goals and uniting its forces, not by ruling in place of the masses. Its authority derived from persuasion and experience, not coercion. When the party began to see itself as the state, when it ceased to be accountable to the workers and placed itself above them, it ceased to be Leninist and became bureaucratic.

This is why Lenin, even in the hardest years after 1917, repeatedly warned against the growth of bureaucracy within the Soviet Republic. He understood that the dangers facing the revolution did not come only from external enemies but from within — from the tendency of the apparatus to separate itself from the people. He demanded control from below, direct accountability, and the renewal of soviet democracy. His struggle in his final years was not to concentrate power, but to return it to the masses. Lenin saw the revolution as a living process that must continually deepen its democratic character or risk degeneration into a state standing over the people.

Under Stalin, this warning was ignored and reversed. What Lenin had built as a means of worker self-government was transformed into its opposite: a centralized system of command in which the Party claimed to embody the will of the people, even as it silenced them. The soviets became empty shells; the working class, which had conquered the state, was rendered powerless within it. The dictatorship of the proletariat — meant to be the rule of the working class as a collective — was replaced by the dictatorship of the Party bureaucracy over the working class. The living socialism of Lenin's vision gave way to the mechanical socialism of decrees and plans.

Lenin's true thought stands therefore as a dividing line between genuine communism and its distortion. For him, socialism was not defined by nationalization or by the presence of a single party, but by the active rule of the workers over all spheres of life. Without this, all talk of socialism becomes hollow. The state may call itself socialist, but if the people do not govern it, it remains only another form of class rule.

The lesson is clear: the liberation of the workers cannot be delegated, even to a party that speaks in their name. The Party may lead, but it must never replace. The state may defend, but it must never dominate. Socialism begins only when the working class takes its destiny into its own hands, collectively, consciously, and freely — when it governs not as a mass commanded from above, but as a living body directing itself from below.

Lenin's idea of socialism as self-government remains the most revolutionary thought of modern times. It demands the abolition not only of capitalism, but of all forms of domination — including those that arise within revolutions themselves. The true dictatorship of the proletariat is not the rule of an apparatus, but the rule of labor itself: organized, armed with knowledge, and determined to transform the world in its own name.

The idea of socialism, as born in the thought of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, was international in its very essence. It was never meant to be confined by borders, nations, or empires. The working class, bound together by the same condition of exploitation, was to rise as a single world force, dissolving all national divisions in a new unity of labor. Lenin's internationalism was not sentiment or diplomacy; it was the recognition that capitalism itself was a global system, and therefore its overthrow must also be global. The victory of socialism in one country could not remain secure unless it spread beyond its borders — for so long as capital ruled anywhere, it would threaten the freedom of workers everywhere.

This principle was embodied in the creation of the Third International, the Communist International (Comintern), in 1919. The Comintern was not a foreign office but a revolutionary organ — a living bond between the struggles of workers in every land. It sought to coordinate and educate the movements that had arisen from the shock of the world war, to ensure that the revolutions in Germany, Hungary, and beyond would not stand isolated as the Russian Revolution had. It represented the highest expression of international solidarity: the belief that the cause of one working class was the cause of all.

Yet after Lenin's death, this great vision was slowly strangled by the rise of Stalinism. The degeneration of the Russian Revolution into bureaucratic rule found its mirror in the transformation of the Comintern from an international movement of equals into an instrument of Soviet state policy. The triumph of "socialism in one country" — a doctrine entirely alien to Marxism and Leninism — marked the turning point. It redefined socialism not as the world emancipation of the working class, but as the consolidation of a single national state. This was the death of internationalism in practice, though it continued to be proclaimed in words.

Under Stalin, the Comintern ceased to be a forum of revolutionary strategy and became a mechanism of obedience. Its member parties were no longer autonomous movements of their own working classes but were reduced to subordinates of Moscow's foreign policy. Their purpose was no longer to ignite revolution in their own countries, but to defend the interests of the Soviet state, even when those interests contradicted the cause of world socialism. The heroic aim of global revolution was replaced by a cautious diplomacy of national security.

The consequences were devastating. In China, the policy of alliance with the bourgeois Kuomintang, dictated by Stalin, led to the massacre of the Shanghai workers in 1927. In Germany, the same subservience to Moscow's strategy divided the working class between Communists and Social Democrats, helping to open the path for fascism. In Spain, during the civil war, Stalin's agents crushed revolutionary socialists and anarchists in the name of "discipline," sacrificing revolution to the preservation of diplomatic alliances. In each case, socialism ceased to be a movement of liberation and became a tool of power — a justification for the actions of a state whose survival had become an end in itself.

The shift from internationalism to nationalism was not only political but spiritual. It replaced the universal language of human emancipation with the language of patriotism and loyalty. The workers of the world were no longer told to unite, but to defend "their" socialist fatherland — even when that fatherland acted as a power among powers. The Red Army, once seen as the army of world revolution, became an army of state interests. The foreign

policy of the Soviet Union ceased to distinguish between revolutionary solidarity and traditional geopolitics. Allies were chosen not by their class nature, but by their usefulness to the security of the Soviet bureaucracy.

In this transformation, socialism was emptied of its internationalist content. It no longer represented the destruction of all domination, but the extension of one state's influence under the name of socialism. The great truth of Marxism — that the liberation of the workers must be the act of the workers themselves, across all nations — was replaced by the falsehood that liberation could be granted by a government or defended by borders.

The tragedy of Stalinist nationalism was not only that it betrayed other revolutions, but that it corrupted the consciousness of the working class for generations. The word "socialism," once synonymous with freedom and solidarity, came to be associated with coercion and state control. Internationalism, which had been the moral foundation of the communist movement, was discredited by its misuse. The banner of world revolution, once raised by the Paris Commune and the October Revolution, was folded into the banner of state interest.

Yet beneath this distortion, the true spirit of internationalism survived — in the hearts of workers who continued to believe in a world without masters, in the writings of revolutionaries who refused to surrender the idea to bureaucracy, and in the enduring truth that the liberation of one class in one nation cannot exist while others remain in chains.

The lesson is clear: socialism cannot be national. It cannot serve as the ideology of a single state. It must remain the movement of humanity itself — a system built not for power, but for liberation. When socialism becomes a tool of state power, it ceases to be socialism at all. True internationalism is not the domination of one country over another, even under a red flag; it is the unity of all workers and oppressed peoples, freely cooperating to destroy every empire, every exploitation, and every state that stands above them.

The time has come to return to the source — to the original thought of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, before it was obscured by bureaucracy, nationalism, and compromise. Their communism was never a system of command or an apparatus of control; it was the movement of the working class to abolish all forms of domination. It was not merely a program for reform, but a total transformation of social life — the end of exploitation in every form, the destruction of wage slavery, and the disappearance of the state as an instrument of oppression.

Marx and Engels wrote that "the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself." This is the foundation of all real socialism. Communism was not, in their thought, a blueprint for an ideal society, but a living process — the self-organization of the workers as a class, seizing control of production and reorganizing it for human need rather than profit. It was to abolish the division between those who labor and those who rule, between intellectual and manual work, between the city and the countryside, and between nations. It was not the perfection of the state, but its end — a society where the administration of things replaced the government of people.

Lenin's contribution was to make this idea concrete in the conditions of modern imperialism. He showed that the struggle against capitalism and the struggle against empire are one and the same. His theory of the state as an organ of class domination revealed that no ruling class can be persuaded to relinquish power; it must be overthrown and replaced by the organized force of the oppressed. Yet Lenin never saw this dictatorship of the proletariat as permanent — it was a weapon, not a goal. Its purpose was to suppress the resistance of the exploiters while beginning the social transformation that would make such suppression unnecessary. In his words, "every state is a special coercive force," and the aim of communism was to bring about the conditions in which such force would disappear altogether.

To return to this thought is not to repeat the past but to recover its living core — the understanding that socialism is not the management of capital by a new elite, but the abolition of capital itself. It means rejecting both the reformist illusion that capitalism can be humanized and the Stalinist distortion that socialism can be built through command and obedience. It means recognizing that communism is not the property of any state or party but the collective striving of humanity toward freedom.

In this synthesis, the revolution is not only an event but a process — the transformation of human relations at every level. It begins with the seizure of power by the workers, but it does not end there. It continues in the remaking of production for need instead of profit, in the creation of councils that govern through participation rather than decree, in the replacement of competition with cooperation, and in the gradual disappearance of coercion as society becomes truly self-governing. The ultimate goal is not a state that calls itself socialist, but a world where no state is necessary.

The abolition of wage slavery lies at the heart of this transformation. So long as labor is bought and sold, so long as one person must work for another to survive, exploitation persists, whatever the flag that flies above the factory. Communism demands not merely the redistribution of wealth but the end of the system of wages itself — the end of labor as a commodity. In its place must arise free association, where each contributes according to ability and receives according to need.

This vision is not utopian. It has already appeared, briefly but vividly, wherever workers and peasants have taken their destiny into their own hands — in the soviets of 1917, in the councils of Berlin and Budapest, in the collectives of Spain, and in the communes of China's early revolution before bureaucratic command crushed them. These moments reveal that communism is not a distant ideal but a real potential within every struggle for freedom.

To rebuild socialism in the twenty-first century, one must draw from this lineage — from the genuine Marxist and Leninist idea of communism as a process of emancipation. The movement must again be international, democratic, and rooted in labor. It must reject the false opposition between reform and dictatorship, and instead affirm the only true alternative: the collective self-rule of the workers, the abolition of exploitation, and the conscious disappearance of the state.

Communism in its true sense is not a dream of control, but of liberation — the ending of class society and of every institution that divides humanity. Its measure is not the strength of a government, but the freedom of the people. Its purpose is not to manage the world as it is, but to create a new one where no person is master or slave, ruler or subject — where humanity governs itself, freely, in the harmony of common labor and shared life.

The revolutions of the twentieth century were humanity's first conscious attempts to move beyond the old world — beyond the rule of capital, empire, and oppression. From the streets of Petrograd to the factories of Berlin, from the councils of Budapest to the communes of China, millions rose not for reform, but for transformation. They sought to end exploitation, to reclaim life from the hands of the few, and to build a society where those who labor would also rule. Though these revolutions were betrayed, distorted, and defeated, they did not fail in spirit. They opened the path. They proved that the working class could seize history and begin to shape it.

Each uprising carried within it a glimpse of the future. The Russian soviets of 1917 revealed that democracy could be born from the shop floor and the village assembly, not from parliaments or bureaucracies. The German and Hungarian revolutions showed the courage and clarity of workers who understood that socialism was not a national dream but a human necessity. The Chinese Revolution demonstrated that even in the world's most oppressed lands, peasants and workers could rise to challenge both imperialism and feudalism. These were not isolated events; they were one movement — the first awakening of humanity to its collective power.

But this awakening was met with twin forces of destruction. From outside came the armed might of capitalism and imperialism, determined to crush the new world before it could take root. From within came the corrosion of Stalinism, which turned the living movement of the people into a machinery of command. Together, they buried the first century of socialism beneath a mountain of lies and betrayals. Yet beneath that mountain, the idea itself remains untouched — the idea of socialism as the free self-government of the workers, as the conscious organization of humanity for equality and peace.

Now, in the light of history, it is clear that the task remains unfinished. The twentieth century did not end the revolution; it only began it. The forms it took — the parties, the states, the armies — were the first experiments in a process that has not yet reached its true expression. The mistakes of the past, both reformist and bureaucratic, reveal what socialism must never again become. It cannot be the management of capitalism under a new name, nor the dictatorship of a party over the people. It must be democracy in its highest form — the direct and collective rule of those who produce the world's wealth, guided not by command but by thought, not by orders but by cooperation.

The future of socialism lies in reclaiming its original essence — the unity of freedom and equality, of production and participation. It must restore the workers' councils, the assemblies, the cooperatives, and the international solidarity that once made the word *comrade* a symbol of hope. It must rebuild the world movement not as an apparatus of control, but as an association of equals bound by shared struggle. Only by restoring this

living democracy can socialism complete the work that the revolutions of the last century began.

The struggle against capitalism continues because its contradictions remain. The world still lives under the tyranny of profit, the domination of imperial power, and the alienation of labor. But now we possess the memory of the revolutions that came before us — their triumphs, their errors, their warnings. From them, we inherit not dogma but direction: the certainty that the liberation of humanity is possible, and that it will be achieved not through states or leaders, but through the organized strength and consciousness of the workers themselves.

The task of our time is therefore not to mourn the past, but to continue it — to draw from its lessons a new beginning. The socialism of the future must be international without domination, democratic without bureaucracy, and revolutionary without terror. It must join the wisdom of Marx, Engels, and Lenin with the lived experience of those who built and fought in the first wave of revolutions.

The twentieth century began with the cry of the oppressed; the twenty-first must end with their victory. The dream of the workers' republic — of a world without exploitation, without masters, and without states — remains before us. It is no longer a distant vision, but the unfinished work of history. The first steps have been taken; the path is open. What remains is to complete the journey — to build socialism as the genuine democracy of workers, beyond both capitalism and the distortions that once claimed its name, toward the full liberation of humanity.

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